

**“THE LACK OF TALENT IS A VIRTUE IN A WOMAN”:  
INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
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Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

By

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## ABSTRACT

There has to date been relatively little research from an interdisciplinary perspective into the ideological dimensions of how women's achievements are reported in the Chinese media. This study seeks to address this lack of inquiry through an interdisciplinary analysis of the coverage in the Mandarin-language *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and the English-language version of *Xinhuanet*, of the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games. A critical comparison of the conventions through which the success of representative male and female Chinese Olympians is depicted in textual and visual form in these three selected online newspapers reveals ideologies motivating the discourse which undermine fair representation of female achievement.

As an interdisciplinary research project, this study deploys Critical Discourse Analysis as practised by Norman Fairclough in exploring the textual representations of the Olympians and cluster criticism associated with Kenneth Burke in examining the visual. While neither critic situates his work in a primarily or overtly feminist context, both provide strategies which serve the purpose of feminist criticism. Fairclough's consistent attention to the pervasive influence of ideologies on discursive practice helps reveal deeply entrenched assumptions about gender roles in the most basic journalistic practice. Moreover, while Burke did not formulate his theories in a feminist context, his "guerilla tactics" (Japp 113), that is, the way that his methods can subvert an audience's expectations regarding the ideologies

driving a text's persuasive practice, are a model for feminist rhetorical critics to uncover covert motivation in discourse and is useful to feminist criticism.

The analyses of the news depictions of the Olympians reveal that there is a systematic use of language and images to portray male athletes as embodying the Olympic ethos of surpassing boundaries, while simultaneously appealing to cultural values which dissociate females from that ethos, and containing the celebration of female virtue within the confines of traditional domestic roles. The perpetuation of the discriminatory gender ideology is best understood in connection with Antonio Gramsci's consent form of "hegemony" (12), whereby the audience consents to the authority of the traditional discourse presented in the media because it appeals to familiar understandings of authority. Media and the audience play reciprocal roles in perpetuating traditional expectations of appropriate behaviour for both genders.

The unequal portrayal of female athletes in the news discourse demonstrates the extent to which Confucian ideology motivates public discourse in China, and that this ideology is so pervasive that its influence can even be detected in overtly anti-Confucian discourses. The study concludes by identifying other areas of popular discourse where an understanding of the perpetuation of traditional ideologies poses obstacles to the advancement of women in Chinese society.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who have never stopped giving everything to me.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

C	Clusters
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
G	Gender
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
ISA	Ideological State Apparatus
NRA	National Rifle Association
PE	Pentad Elements
RSA	Repressive State Apparatus



## ABBREVIATED TITLES FOR WORKS CITED IN TEXT

Abbreviations	Original Works	Authors
“A Comparative Study”	“A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Cultural Context and the Influence on Communication.”	Jin, Tian
“A Critical Discourse Analysis”	“A Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Relations in Brazil.”	Magalhães, Maria Izabel S.
“A Grammar”	<i>A Grammar of Motives</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“A Rhetoric”	<i>A Rhetoric of Motives</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“Aims”	“Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis.”	van Dijk, Teun A.
“Attitudes”	<i>Attitudes toward History</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“Critical Discourse Analysis”	“Critical Discourse Analysis.” In <i>Marges Linguistiques</i>	Fairclough, Norman
“Critical”	“Critical Discourse Analysis.” In <i>How to Analyse Talk in Institutional Settings</i>	Fairclough, Norman
“Discourse”	<i>Discourse and Social Change</i>	Fairclough, Norman
“Discourse”	“Discourse, Ideology, and Context.”	van Dijk, Teun A.
“Discourse”	<i>Discourse and Power</i>	van Dijk, Teun A.
“Feminist”	<i>Feminist Rhetorical Theories</i>	Foss, Karen A., Foss, Sonja K., and Cindy Griffin
“For Marx”	<i>For Marx</i>	Althusser, Louis
“Gender Politics”	<i>Gender Politics in Modern China</i>	Barlow, Tani E.
“Hegemony”	“Hegemony, Intellectuals, and the State.”	Gramsci, Antonio
“Interdiscursivity”	“Interdiscursivity, Gender Identity and the Politics of Literacy in Brazil.”	Magalhães, Maria Izabel S.
“Language”	<i>Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“Language”	<i>Language and Power</i>	Fairclough, Norman
“Lenin”	<i>Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays</i>	Althusser, Louis
“Man”	<i>Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric</i>	Campbell, Karlyn K.
“Methods”	<i>Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective</i>	Brock, Bernard L., Robert L. Scott, and James W. Chesebro

“Nationalist”	“Nationalist and Feminist Discourses on Jianmei (Robust Beauty) during China’s ‘National Crisis’ in the 1930s.”	Gao, Yunxiang
“News”	<i>News as Discourse</i>	van Dijk, Teun A.
“On Symbols”	<i>On Symbols and Society</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“Permanence”	<i>Permanence and Change</i>	Burke, Kenneth
“Politics”	“Politics, Ideology, and Discourse.”	van Dijk, Teun A.
“Principles”	“Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.”	van Dijk, Teun A.
“Rethinking”	“Rethinking the ‘Iron Girls’: Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.”	Jin, Yihong
“Rhetoric”	<i>Rhetoric in Popular Culture</i>	Brummett, Barry
“Rhetorical Criticism”	<i>Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice</i> . 4 <sup>th</sup> ed.	Foss, Sonja K.
“Rhetorical”	<i>Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice</i>	Foss, Sonja K.
“Selections”	<i>Selections from the Prison Notebooks</i>	Gramsci, Antonio
“The Feminist”	“The Feminist Review.”	Shi, Lian
“Women”	“Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Women in China.”	Gao, Xiongya

## PROLOGUE

### MY JOURNEY TO WHO I AM NOW

#### *Where I Come From*

I was born in Jiamusi, a border city of the most northeastern province in China, Heilongjiang Province thirty years ago (see the red areas in fig. 0.1 and fig. 0.2). It is a medium-sized city in China located on a plain. Moreover, the fertile black soil of the plain for its length and breadth reputes Jiamusi one of the only three plains in the world that are covered with black soil, which provides the best natural condition for the growth of crops. In spite of the fact that it is the most inland city in the northeast (adjoining Russia in the north), it has formed its own unique local culture.



Figure 0.1. Map of China showing province boundaries



Figure 0.2. The location of the city of Jiamusi in Heilongjiang Province in China

In this culture, people have not only reserved the natural and the cultural heritages from their ancestors, but created their own for modern life. On this land, Han Chinese and minority Chinese co-exist, which has greatly enriched the composition of the local culture and provided people of different cultural backgrounds opportunities to interact effectively. Moreover, people living in here are enthusiastic about expressing their appreciation of the beauty of nature, for example by carving diversified sculptures with ice (see fig. 0.3) and snow (see fig. 0.4) in winter, which has attracted both national and international audiences. Being a member of this culture, I am proud of the diversity of the culture and the creativity of the people.



Figure 0.3. Ice Carvings in Heilongjiang Province, China



Figure 0.4. Snow Carvings in Heilongjiang Province, China

However, the relative conservativeness of both the local and the national culture where I come from is a factor that cannot be ignored in my positioning of who I want to be. In my earlier education there were pre-set expectations of what I should accomplish as a daughter and a female student. Most of the suggestions were related to the stereotypical and traditional roles of women, these include, but are not limited to, non-intellect-related jobs, marriage by an expected age, or less education than boys. This day-to-day reinforcement of the gender stereotypes of women by my family and the male-student preference phenomena that I have observed in my earlier education strengthened my resolve to change the ingrained ideology of women's roles. To this end, I started my long journey of higher education.

### *My Educational Experiences*

My experience with my higher education was full of dramatic scenarios created by the ups and downs and the various turning points that I had faced in the whole journey. However, each time I was able to overcome the challenges and reorient my attitude towards my goals with the inspiration from one of my favourite poems – Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,*

*And sorry I could not travel both*

*And be one traveler, long I stood*

*And looked down one as far as I could*

*To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

### **My Bachelor's**

In the summer of 2005, carrying the admission letter, I entered College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Northeast Normal University, which is a private college in

Changchun, Jilin, China. However, this college was not the one that I wanted to study at due to the fact that private colleges in China do not have high prestige and that this academic background can be a negative aspect that influences my future job searching.

I remember that I was shocked the moment when I saw the undignified decoration of the college on the registration day. It had only one teaching building and one residence building for female students and besides that, there were no other facilities. Seeing the stark contrast with the university surrounding that I was imagining, I could not control my tears in front of my sister who accompanied me from my hometown to the city where I was going to spend four years. Later I learned that it was due to the inadequate space in the main campus that English Department was temporarily located separately in a teaching building that used to belong to the Department of Physical Education of Northeast Normal University. Surprisingly, different from other freshmen, I did not feel sad because of having left the hometown where I had spent twenty years. Maybe my earlier family education style, which required both my sister and I to be independent, had helped me in this regard.

In my four years of undergraduate study, I achieved knowledge, achieved independence, and achieved an individual worldview. More importantly, I realized who I was and what I wanted to do. Therefore, at the beginning of my third year of undergraduate study, I made resolution to further my education after Bachelor's. For that purpose, I started another two-year marathon preparation (the first was for preparing for the university entrance examination in high school) for university entrance examination. But this time it was for a Master's degree.



## **My Master's**

There were many times during the two years' laborious preparation for the Master's entrance examination of Northeast Normal University (a university of the Project 211 National Key Universities initiated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China) that I had thought of giving up my initial goals. It was not always me myself who had doubted whether I was capable of passing the examination or not; discouragement from my family constituted an external factor for me to have thought of abandoning my dream. Due to the influence of traditional thinking about women's gender roles, my parents also believed that a girl should not receive too much education but just get married in her early twenties because according to them, the more education a girl receives the harder it is for her to find a husband. However, my interest in studying and my perseverance of achieving my goals had given me a lot of momentum in overcoming the arduousness of this long journey. Finally, less than ten students out of the original sixty in my year of study had taken the entrance examination for English Language Studies at Northeast Normal University, and I was one of the only two who passed the examination for a Linguistics major. I proved to my family that a girl can perform equally well and even better than boys. With an essay topic on classroom interaction between English-language teachers and learners, I completed my four years of rich undergraduate learning experience in July 2009 and started my Master's study at Northeast Normal University in September.

However, the final major that I was ultimately admitted to was Curriculum and Teaching of English Language, which belongs to English Language Studies but was not a

research area that I was interested in. The result may have been due to my uncompetitive performance during my oral examination of the Master's entrance examination at Northeast Normal University, although I was confident in my performance during the examination. This second time of deciding whether just to accept what was given to me or try for a second time for studying what I was really interested in put me in hesitation. However, I knew that I had devoted all my energy to the preparation of the entrance examination and I would not perform better the next time. Therefore, I reoriented my attitude towards the new area of English Language Studies because I knew that by nature, Curriculum and Teaching of English Language is an application of the English linguistic theories to the exploration of existing problems with English language teaching and learning. By knowing theories of both areas of English Language Research, I was actually widening my horizon and laying solid foundation for my future language teaching or research.

Therefore, I did not give up my interest in linguistics studies. In my two years' of Master's study, in addition to completing the coursework requirements of my own major, I had also attended all the coursework offered for Linguistics students. The attendance of all the Linguistics coursework not only had helped me with the selection of my Master's thesis's topic, but more importantly, had laid foundations for my doctoral studies now.

It may due to the fact that I had shown no interest in finding a job when my Master's study was going to end that one day my doctoral roommate advised me by saying "Why not applying for scholarships from China Scholarship Council for pursuing your doctoral degree abroad? I think you are very suitable and eligible for doing research since you have shown

strong interest in research and more importantly, you are perseverant and hardworking.”

Hearing her advice, I felt both encouraged and excited. However, along with excitement, there was also anxiety in me because going abroad to study seemed to be an unimaginable thing for me owing to the fact that there were thousands of students from other universities in China who were far more outstanding than me. However, I also knew that I could not wait for too long to decide on it as graduation was upcoming. Consequently, during my internship in a high school in southern China at the beginning of the second (also the last) year of my Master’s, I was working on my internship experience on one hand and applying for Linguistics doctoral programmes in universities abroad on the other. Luckily, finally the University of Saskatchewan in Canada accepted me. A few months later, China Scholarship Council also approved my application for the full-time scholarship for studying in Canada. In July 2011, with a thesis on how high school students in China acquire the English grammar constructions of “Give something + to + somebody” and “Give somebody + something” from a Cognitive Linguistics’ perspective, I completed my Master’s study, and the thesis received high acknowledgement from my advisory committee.

### **My Ph.D.**

With the yearning for knowledge, I got on board Air China CA 991 for the airline of Beijing to Vancouver on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. It was the first time for me to sit in an airline that led to a foreign country. When the plane was lifting off from Beijing International Airport, all the memories of the distinctive paths that I had taken, the efforts that I had made, and the

experiences that I had gained in this whole journey all came to my mind. Nonetheless, I knew that it was not the end, but a new beginning, and what was in front of me would be several times of the endeavour that I had made in the past. The endeavour would include not only how to adapt to a new culture, a Western culture, but to the fact that there was not a single person who I knew, or a family with whom that I could spend time with. More importantly, I had to acclimate myself to a new academic environment, which, insofar as I knew, was significantly different from that of the East.

On August 3, 2011, Canadian time, after eleven hours of flight and crossing the whole Pacific Ocean, I landed in Vancouver International Airport (see fig. 0.5 below).

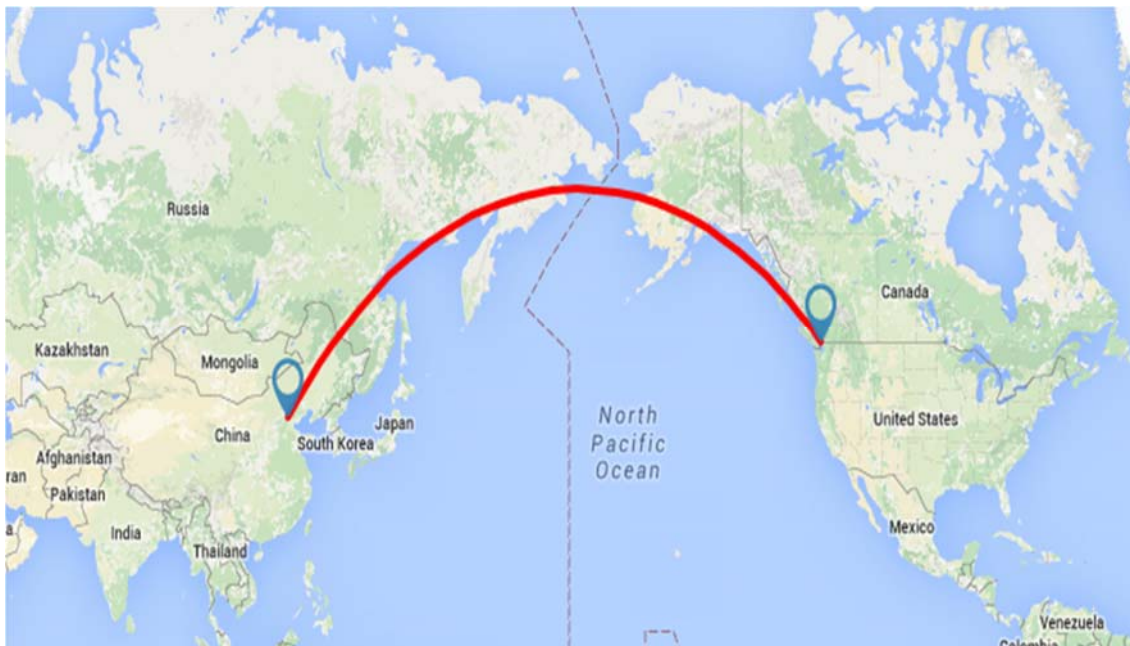


Figure 0.5. My journey from Beijing, China, to Vancouver, Canada

However, shortly after I landed, I encountered the first challenge that I had to deal with for my life in a new environment – I did not look for a place to live before coming to Canada. Before coming to Canada, I was assuming that universities in Canada would do the same as those in China by going to the airports to pick new students up and then bringing them to their dormitories assigned on campuses. However, all my expectations vanished until I acquainted with a Chinese male student in Vancouver International Airport who was also coming to the University of Saskatchewan for his doctoral studies. After a short conversation with him, I found that my previous assumptions about what universities in Canada would do for new students were all wrong and I was going to be homeless the moment I stepped out of Saskatoon's airport. It was also at that moment that I realized that my independence cultivated for years was going to play some roles in my studying and living in Canada. Fortunately, with the help of this friend's friends in Saskatoon who were also students at the University of Saskatchewan, my first night in Canada was secured.

My exploration of everything for my study and life in Canada started on the second day after I landed in Saskatoon. Again with the help of the friend's friends, I managed to find a place to live, to register for the new term, and send my registration documents to Chinese embassy in Canada. On August 8<sup>th</sup>, I began my study in Canada with a course of acculturation to Canada's academic life. After about one month's intensive training of the academic requirements in Canadian universities, my doctoral studies at the University of Saskatchewan formally started on September 1, 2011.

The beginning of my doctoral studies was challenging because of the intense coursework requirement that I had to meet. Nevertheless, under the guidance of my academic advisor, I progressed significantly within short time, including both the in-depth exploration of my research topic for my PhD degree and other aspects of my academic training such as teaching and conference presentations. My teaching as a Sessional Lecturer of rhetorical communication in the Spring term of 2014 in the College of Engineering gave me a distinct perspective regarding teaching in a Western country. In spite of the fact that I once had an internship experience in my Master's study in China, my audiences were from the same culture as I was and they were high school students, which did not provide me a view of how teaching and learning would happen in a Western academic context. With nervousness and excitement, I stepped on the platform of my first class at the University of Saskatchewan. Fortunately, my first teaching experience in a Western culture went very well and at the end of that term, I gained a good evaluation from both my students and my peers, which was another proud experience for me. Shortly after my teaching experience ended, I started to work on my research topic on gender inequality in the area of sports after two years' exploration.

### *Why This Research Topic*

There are various reasons that have triggered my mind of exploring gender inequality. Firstly, it may due to my critical nature about the unfairness and the unjust aspect of the society since my childhood that I determined to work on something that could change the

situation. The other reason for me to conduct this feminist research was to broaden my research repertoire of English Language and Linguistics. For more than ten years, two thirds of my time was spent exploring how Chinese English language learners and English language teachers interact in classroom and how Chinese English language learners use a particular register of English grammar from a Cognitive Linguistics' perspective. Both types of research were characterized by their emphasis on learners' knowledge and daily use of language in classroom context. Instead of expanding my horizon I was challenged by the use of English linguistic theories to explain language itself, rather than considering the social effects of language use in every day experiences. More importantly, reflecting upon my experience as a daughter and a female student, as well as upon what I have found from news reportage on gender relations in daily life, I decided to work on the topic of gender inequality.

Arguably, many of the current issues encountered today (both regional and global), such as regional wars, international conflicts, racial or gender discrimination, are direct results of the ideological and symbolic use of the textual and visual forms of language. News media is a powerful means through which ideologies can immediately reach a large audience thus influence a wide-ranging people's perception of the world. In many instances, global media glorifies one group and defames the other. Online media habitually portrays women on a discriminatory basis; what the audience perceives concerning women's gender roles will also be biased due to the ideological power that news media has in influencing people's worldview (see van Dijk, "Politics" 729).

In addition, an examination of existing feminist studies reveals that research that focuses on the unequal media representations of gender inequality in sports context from an interdisciplinary critical perspective has not gained scholars' wide-range attention. As the sports scientist Dong Jinxia argues, "[s]port has been virtually neglected in mainstream feminist studies, although arguably it has played a considerable part in the world" (177). Therefore, this study aims to bridge a gap in exploring the unequal representations of female achievement in sports context by drawing upon textual and visual portrayal of male and female athletes in London 2012 Olympic Games.

While the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games offer a productive field of comparison for future research, this dissertation does not intend to conduct a cross-sectional research, but focus merely on how male and female athletes are depicted in the London 2012 Olympic Games. There are two primary reasons for focusing on the London 2012 Olympic games in this study: one is that being outside of China, the discourse surrounding the London Games is perhaps more "normative" than the special occasion that a Chinese games represents; the other is that the achievement of specific athletes in the London games, and of Ye Shiwen (the Chinese swimmer) in particular, provide a highly focussed window for the analysis. Given these considerations, this research focuses specifically on the exploration of how news media in China depicts male and female athletes during the London 2012 Olympic Games.



## *Olympic Values*

The Olympic Games are often considered as the most significant occasion where elite athletes can display their expertise in sports skills. Therefore, it is “often regarded to be the most important sports event in the calendar” (Miah and García 46). According to the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, the vision of “Olympism was for it to become a broad, far-reaching ‘philosophy of life’, of which an integral part should be the pursuit and celebration of other human endeavours, *not* just sport” (Miah and García 46; emphasis original). In addition, de Coubertin remarks by saying that the Olympic Games should be interpreted as “the harmonious interplay of physical and intellectual skills, so that – set in an artistic, aesthetic frame – it would make an important contribution to human happiness” (qtd. in Miah and García 10). In other words, the Olympic Games are not only a place where elite athletes compete in skills, but also an occasion where concepts of “‘rights’, ‘human dignity’, ‘non-discrimination’ and the ‘universal’ application of the Olympic principles” should be prioritized (Miah and García 11).

However, Vertinsky *et al.* “approach sport as a socially constructed space and system, which over one hundred years since its establishment still privileges the male body as superior” (qtd. in Horne and Whannel 172). As a consequence,

[A] central problem with organized sport has been the way that sport-related policies – especially those enforcing sex segregation – have codified historical myth about female physical inferiority, fostering a system which, while

offering women more opportunities than ever before, has kept them from being perceived as equal athletes to men. (Vertinsky *et al.* 44)

Put differently, the physical distinctions of female athletes from males in sports are the primary reasons for constructing male athletes as “inherently athletically superior to females” (Horne and Whannel 173). Based on this assumption, any achievement that female Olympians make may be subject to the scrutiny of their physical constraints, which contradicts to the Olympic values that Pierre de Coubertin proposed. Consequently, this research is dedicated to expose such an essentialist ideology in representing female achievements in news media.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

Gender inequalities and biases pervade cultures worldwide, preventing women and girls from fully realizing their rights to the same privileges of men and boys. It has been two centuries since “the nineteenth century women’s movement” (Gillis *et al.* 1) in the West that gender inequality became a topic of debate. Efforts have been made to the improvement of gender equality around the world through both scholarly research and the establishment of organizations that protect women’s interest. Nevertheless, the efforts are not yet complete and some of them are even simultaneously perpetuating gender inequality (either consciously or unconsciously). Consequently, aiming to contribute to a critical thinking of the pervasiveness of gender inequality in one of the forms of popular culture – news media – this study employs an interdisciplinary perspective in exposing how news representations of gender relations in Chinese news media perpetuate an ideology of gender inequality.

More importantly, this interdisciplinary dissertation works primarily within the theoretical construct of both Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Rhetorical Criticism and at the same time, it draws upon insights from multiple disciplines, including Language and Linguistics, Rhetorical Studies, Media Studies, Gender Studies, Sociology, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Sport, and Education (see fig. 1.1).



Figure 1.1. Interdisciplinary nature of the research

This will explain why gender inequality as a social issue is a result of multiple social, cultural, and historical factors. In addition, the interdisciplinary research will also demonstrate why a single perspective in exploring gender inequality will not be adequate. As there is a gap in the literature on researching gender inequality in the area of sports by using theories and methods from both CDA and Rhetorical Criticism, this research will fill the gap. To this end, this study examines both the textual and the visual depictions of representative male and female Chinese Olympians in *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet* throughout the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games. The three newspapers are of different languages and regions, which will allow audiences of different cultural

backgrounds a proper interpretation of gender relations in China (for a detailed introduction to the three newspapers, see Chapter 4). Moreover, this study applies Norman Fairclough's method of conducting CDA in the analysis of the textual representations and Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis in the examination of the visual portrayal of the Olympians.

### *Overall Representations of Gender Relations in News Media in China*

The depiction of gender relations in news media in China has experienced significant transformations at the threshold of 1978. Before 1978, news media in China were strictly controlled by the government and it was primarily a vehicle for political propaganda (Bu 3). Consequently, the scope of the news coverage was limited and the news contents reflected largely the state's ideology. Since the launching of the open-door policy in 1978, China has become an active participant in globalization and news media have been given more freedom to report on previously not-widely reported topics such as gender relations, corruptions, and unemployment. Nevertheless, in the coverage of gender relations, there are more open debates on topics such as homosexuality, transsexualism, abortion, and divorce, gender inequality as a topic has not been given concern in media reportage. The lack of portrayal of gender inequality in Chinese news media is a result of both the external organizational and the internal cultural influences with the latter being the fundamental root.

Organizationally, the inadequate coverage of gender inequality in news media is inalienable from the unequal distribution of gender power in the decision-making positions in news institutions. According to an analysis of the proportions of male and female

newsmakers and the news contents on men and women in 8 mainstream Chinese newspapers in 1996, statistics showed that “84% of newsmakers are men, 16% were women; 71% of all images are men’s, 29% were women’s; 0.9% of news items related [to] women’s issues or women’s movement of a total 10,808 news items” (Feng; qtd. in Bu 4). The statistics reveals not only the huge disproportion in the reportage on men and women in mainstream Chinese newspapers, but also reflects the concentration of decision-making regarding news reporting in male hands in Chinese news institutions. As Bu comments, when “there is no tradition of media literacy or education in China, most of people [will not be] critical of media but [will] very [easily] ... believe in them” (3). Therefore, the inadequate coverage of gender inequality existing in Chinese society by Chinese news media will not only prevent audiences from realizing that gender inequality is being practised by news media in their coverage, but will also further pose a barrier for media practitioners, for audiences, and even for women themselves in responding adequately to the issue.

In addition to the organizational factor, the unequal depictions of gender relations in Chinese news media is fundamentally a result of the rigid and selective interpretation of the traditional Confucian gender philosophy which by nature values a fluid and complementary relationship between two things in the same category. When applied to the definition of gender relations, the Confucian gender philosophy was translated into a doctrine that favors patriarchal gender power (see Rosenlee 2006), as reflected through the “Three obediences and the four virtues” criteria for womanhood (Andors 13), the proper feminine roles that a

woman is expected to play, and the “Three cultural imperatives” (Rosenlee 123) (see Chapter 7).

As an interdisciplinary analytical perspective, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a tool for examining how a discriminatory ideology is constructed and conveyed through discourse (Fairclough, “Critical” 26). In comparison, rhetorical criticism focuses on examining how a rhetor employs persuasive elements (verbal and/or non-verbal) in an artefact in establishing a worldview and thus to identify her ideology with audiences’ or audiences’ ideology with hers. Accordingly, CDA and rhetorical criticism complement each other in exploring how the terms (verbal and/or non-verbal) that a discourse deploys interact in constructing and maintaining an ideology. Therefore, using CDA and rhetorical criticism as both analytical perspectives and research methods, I will examine how news discourse in China consistently represent male achievements in the Olympic Games as far more significant than those of females and how male athletes are empowered while females are disempowered through both verbal and non-verbal communication features in the news. With the introduction to the type of discourse that this study is going to focus on, I will briefly describe the research context of gender inequality.

### *Research Context*

In the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games, both male and female Chinese athletes made remarkable achievements in breaking world records. However, an examination of the news coverage of male and female Chinese athletes during the Olympic Games (July 27,

2012 to August 12, 2012, London Time, GMT, Britain; and July 27, 2012 to August 13, 2012, Beijing Time, China) in Chinese newspapers, including both Mandarin and English publications, reveals that while male agency in breaking boundaries is consistently affirmed, the idea of women exceeding boundaries is undermined and constrained in the news discourse. The differences are demonstrated through the significant attention paid to portraying female athletes' domestic roles and feminine characteristics, as well as the various virtues that they are expected to practise, while male athletes are considered embodiments of dominance and supremacy.

In principle, the Olympic Games encourage breaking boundaries, as expressed in the Olympic motto "Swifter, higher, stronger." Nevertheless, the depictions of female Chinese athletes in Chinese news discourse reinforce traditional boundaries on female agency which prevent recognition of female athletes as transcending limitations in the spirit of the Olympics. Olympians are the best practitioners of the Olympic ethos. Constraining female Olympians from crossing social and physical boundaries in the arena will only contradict the Olympic ethos that highlight "fair play", "respect for human dignity, rejection of discrimination of any kind on whatever grounds, be it race, colour, sex, sexual orientations ...".<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this research considers the perpetuation of gender discrimination against female athletes in Chinese news discourse as an issue that requires urgent attention from media practitioners, from audiences, as well as from female athletes

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<sup>1</sup>. See the Code of Ethics of the Olympics Games at the Official website of the Olympic Movement at <http://www.olympic.org/ethics-commission?tab=code-of-ethics>.



themselves in recognizing their competence and agency and competence in making achievements.

### *Theoretical Nature of This Study*

This dissertation is first a case study owing to its concern about the reinforcement of gender inequality in a specific type of discourse and in a specific culture. Additionally, it explores how discourse in modern Chinese news venues (represented by newspapers) perpetuates a discriminatory gender ideology against female athletes. The distinctions concerning the depictions of male and female athletes in Chinese news discourse reflect both conscious and unconscious perpetuation of an “essentialist” gender ideology. *Essentialism* is the belief that any specific entity has fixed attributes that define its identity (Cartwright 615). When applied to the interpretation of gender relations, *essentialism* asserts that “[w]omen’s essence is assumed to be given and universal and is usually, though not necessarily, identified with women’s biology and ‘natural’ characteristics” (Grosz 47). Moreover, *essentialism*:

[E]ntails the belief that those characteristics defined as women’s essence are shared in common by all women at all times. It implies a limit of the variations and possibilities of change – it is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her essence. Her essence underlies all the apparent variations differentiating women from each other. (Grosz 47)

However, as Schmitz argues, “the only natural differences between the sexes are bodily; intellectual and psychical differences are only produced by education and socialization and

can accordingly also be abolished” (177). Put another way, men and women are by nature equal and the distinctions between men and women with regard to the gender roles that they are expected to play are merely results of socialization which is subject to human intervention.

This research is also a feminist study owing to its orientation towards facilitating dialogue and debate in order to effect change in public perceptions of women in China. Not only media practitioners, but also audiences, and female athletes themselves need to realize that they participate to various degrees, however subconsciously, in the perpetuation of the discriminatory gender ideology. Consequently, all groups involved must become aware of how pervasive discriminatory traditional ideologies are in public discourse in China, so that a public debate aimed at recognizing and resisting practices congenial to the survival of these ideologies may occur.

### *Research Questions and Research Objectives*

The research questions that frame this study revolve around three governing trains of thought: first, how systematically news discourse in China perpetuates a discriminatory gender ideology against women? Second, what are the factors that have resulted in the discriminatory representations of women and their impacts on modern Chinese culture? And third, how promoting awareness of discriminatory ideologies may lead to changes in discourse regarding gender relations in Chinese society? When situated in the relevant Olympics context, this research will explore the following three research questions:

1. What gender ideologies are encoded in the textual and the visual representations of male and female Chinese athletes in *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet*?
2. What are the social and cultural contexts for the perpetuation of a discriminatory gender ideology against female Chinese athletes in the news discourse?
3. What kinds of research are necessary to facilitate a better awareness among news producers, audiences, and of female athletes themselves, to encourage resistance to discriminatory ideologies?

As each research question requires an independent chapter to answer, therefore, I will answer the first research question in Chapter 5 (which will focus particularly on the critical discourse analysis of the textual representations of male and female athletes) and Chapter 6 (which will concentrate on the cluster analysis of the visual portrayal of male and female athletes), the second research question in Chapter 7, and the last in Chapter 8. By examining how the recurrence of terms communicate an ideology that male athletes are associated with active agency while females symbolize passive agency, this research aim to contribute to a critical awareness of the perpetuation of gender inequality in the field of sports in China as manifested in news discourse.

### *Research Significance*

As forecasted earlier, this research is by nature a feminist study and it deploys Norman Fairclough CDA in examining the textual representations of male and female

athletes in the news discourse and uses Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis (an approach in rhetorical criticism) in analysing the visual representations of the athletes. The exploration of the news depictions of the athletes through exploring "a range of narrative" that emphasizes the "biologically determined sexual differences with hierarchal gender characteristics" (Evans 4) is significant both theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, gender inequality is by nature a social issue that requires a consideration of the multiple social and cultural factors that resulted in it. Characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, CDA will allow us an opportunity to examine why an explanation of gender inequality in Chinese society cannot entirely adopt a Western paradigm (see a detailed elaboration upon the differences between Chinese and Western feminism in Chapter 2). In addition, as the review of the literature will show in Chapter 3, there has not been much attention that has been paid to explore gender inequality that discourse perpetuates both in China and around the world by integrating Critical Discourse Analysis and rhetorical analysis. Therefore, this study is an innovative work in this area. Last but not least, as the literature review of the scholarly work in Chapter 3 will also show, current existing feminist critical discourse studies in China focus mainly on the exploration of gender inequality in English-language materials produced in English-speaking world, and a trivial amount of research has paid attention to the examination of gender inequality in a Mandarin-language context. Therefore, exploring how the discriminatory gender ideology is manifested in both Mandarin – the primary national language spoken in Chinese society – and in the English material will provide us an in-depth understanding of how Chinese social and cultural

traditions have deeply affected the definition of gender relationships in modern Chinese society.

In practical terms, as argued earlier, this study aims ultimately to raise a critical awareness of the unequal portrayal of the achievements of male and female athletes in Chinese news discourse. When female athletes are portrayed equally to males with regard to their agency and competence in claiming accomplishments, it will not only enhance their motivation to make contributions to the development of sports in China and in the world, but will also promote a more receptive interpretation of gender relationships in both China and worldwide.

With a general introduction to the research background of this study, the following chapter will expound the theoretical foundation upon which explorations of gender ideology in the Olympics context is built.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research works within the theoretical framework of feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and feminist Rhetorical Criticism. In this chapter, I will expand on each of these two theoretical constructs. Feminism is a feature that characterizes this study. Moreover, it is a theoretical foundation upon which feminist CDA and feminist Rhetorical Criticism are built. Consequently, it is of importance to first shed light on feminism regarding how it is defined in the Western world and in China and how it has developed in each of the two geographical areas. Then I will enlarge on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and rhetorical criticism. At the end of this chapter, a discussion of Norman Fairclough's insight into the relations between discourse and society and Kenneth Burke's argument on the relations between symbols and society will be given.

#### *An Overview of Feminism*

Feminism has been defined in the context of cultural, economic, and political life, where the focus falls either on individual self-perception and self-expression or on broader forms of political and social activism. For instance, according to Chinese feminist scholar Ya-chen Chen, women should have financial independence that “allow[s] independent thinking and writing” (2). In comparison, the New Zealand feminist author Misha Kavka argues that we need to consider the roles of multiple historical elements such as time and

place in shaping people's efforts to achieve social justice (xii). In other words, a shared concern among feminist scholars around the world is that women themselves can decide on their lives independently within their own cultural contexts.

In the Western world, gender is considered as a social construct which differs from sex as a biological marker. Nevertheless, "most of the arguments about what is considered to be appropriate behaviour for women ... assume a natural relationship between biology, in particular reproduction, and all the other meanings associated with the symbolic category of 'woman'" (Evans 28). Alternatively, even gender – a result of socialization – has been moralized around the concept of sexuality. By contrast, the sexual distinction through the concept of "male" and "female" based exclusively upon biological differences in Chinese Confucian tradition applies usually to animals but not humans (Rosenlee 5). In the human world, "gender" only describes men and women's social roles and the relations between them, and "it is through occupying different familial, kinship roles that a 'woman' as a gendered being is made" (Rosenlee 5). Therefore, "a narrow definition of feminism as about sexuality and rights ... will not be sufficient given the historical framework in which the politics of gender were lived and written about in China" (Dooling 28). Moreover, "[n]either position can neatly be mapped onto any preconceived ideas of what Chinese feminism was or should have been in opposition to the fiction of a totalized Western feminism" (Dooling 8). Put differently, the exploration of gender inequality in Chinese society needs to take into account the complex workings of the social and cultural traditions that shape the definition of gender relations in that context.

In addition to the distinctions with the definition of feminism in the West and in China, feminism has experienced different stages of development in both social contexts. However, a shared characteristic between the development of feminism in the West and in China is that both has experienced three stages of development, which feminist scholars in both social contexts called First-wave feminism, Second-wave feminism, and Third-wave feminism.

In the Western world, First-wave feminism arose from “the nineteenth century women’s movement which was a response to a shared exclusion from political, social and economic life”; it sought to “extend the social contract so that it included political citizenship for women” (Gillis *et al.* 1). Specifically, First-wave feminists were more concerned with gaining suffrage rights for women (Heilmann 4). In the Second-wave feminism in 1960s and the 1970s, feminists started to concern themselves with broader issues that affected them such as “reproduction, mothering, sexual violence, expressions of sexuality and domestic labour” (Gillis *et al.* 1). Although there has been great achievement made in striving for self-determination in those contexts, woman activists started to raise questions about “the nature of identity, unity and collectivity” (Gillis *et al.* 1), which marks the approaching of Third-wave feminism in the 1990s.

Feminists of the Third-wave feminism acknowledge not only “the range of women’s experiences”, but also recognize “the validity of arguments that once seemed contradictory” (Freedman 5). According to Freedman, “[i]nstead of debating whether women are similar to or different from men, most feminists [of the Third-wave feminism] recognize that both



statements are true” (5). Moreover, “[i]nstead of asking which is more important, gender or race, most feminists [of the Third-wave feminism] acknowledge the indivisibility and interaction of these social categories” (Freedman 5). For instance:

Along with demanding the right to work, feminists have redefined work to include caring as well as earning. Along with calling for women’s independence, feminists have recognized the interdependence of all people, as well as the interconnection of gender equality with broader social justice movements.

(Freedman 5)

Put another way, with the growing experiences in women’s movements, feminists have become more aware of the interrelation between gender inequality with a broader scope of social and cultural factors.

Similar to the different stages of the development of feminism in the Western world, feminism in China has also experienced a similar process. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were efforts made to call for the shaping of the “New Woman”<sup>2</sup> by drawing on experiences from Europe and the United States “[s]ince many believed that ‘women’s rights were most advanced in America and less advanced in China’” (Shi, “The Feminist” 1-2). Consequently, women’s magazines in China started to devote space to the representation of the lives of American women and their success, “focusing particularly on the educational and economic opportunities that American culture seemed to afford to women” (Chin 35).

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<sup>2</sup>. The term “New Woman” was originally coined by writer Sarah Grand in her article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” published in the *North American Review* in March 1894 and further popularized by British-American writer Henry James (see Stevens 1998) to describe the increasing number of the educated, independent, and career women in Europe and the United States.

However, the borrowing of feminist experience from America and/or other countries in advancing the development of feminism in China “give[s] rise to tension and ambivalence at several levels” (Chin 40). The ambivalence is manifested through, first, the disputes on the goals of the movement due to the fact “some reformers [reject] the subordination of women’s rights to national interests and demanding women’s equality as an end in itself” (Chin 41); second, the inconsistent construction of women’s roles and images in both the textual and the visual discourse (Chin 41); third, the discourse on the New Woman was largely “produced by and for men”, which makes the authenticity of the voice questionable (Chin 41); and lastly, “the idea of modernity itself was in flux, as was the question of how modernity related to nationalism, the New Woman and Westernization” (Chin 41).

Alternatively, the coexistence of both liberation and containment of women constitutes a barrier to the genuine achievement of gender equality. Characterized as an “anti-imperialist, anti-Confucian, nationalist, and intellectual movement [that] aimed at rejuvenating the nation” (Chow *et al.* 163), the New Cultural Movement of the May Fourth Era (1915-1925) marked the beginning of First-wave feminism in China (Chow *et al.* 163). Although women during the First-wave feminism in China were encouraged to innovate traditional Confucian women’s roles such as pursuing *Jianmei* (which refers to “Robust Beauty” gained through rigorous physical exercise), a “woman’s body, [is still] a site of contested meanings, [which] reflected the uncertain status of women as national subjects” (Gao, “Nationalist” 104). Accordingly, First-wave feminism in China perpetuated the ambivalence regarding the genuine liberation of women.

Second-wave feminism in China corresponds roughly with Mao's era between 1950s and 1970s (Chow *et al.* 163). During this time period, the "Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made major efforts to promote women's liberation" and:

[H]elped establish the CCP's official theories and ideology on women based primarily on Marxist analyses of 'the woman question,' thus greatly influencing the generation of scholars growing up in the Mao era and laying the theoretical foundation for studying women's issues today. (Chow *et al.* 163)

According to Marxist feminism, woman's liberation can only be achieved through the creation of a classless society where properties are redistributed and women are "equal members of society" (Riley; qtd. in Harper-Hinton 2). In Mao Zedong's era in China, although women were described as "holding up half the sky",<sup>3</sup> "due to the patriarchal terms under which ... changes were made, the gains for women were limited" (Harper-Hinton 3). Therefore, the "[l]iberation of women from feudal customs and practices was [merely] part of an overall ideological rhetoric regarding class struggle delivered to the masses under the leadership of Mao Zedong" (Harper-Hinton 3). Examples can be found in the "Iron Girl" campaign during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Jin, "Rethinking" 188).

The "Iron Girl" campaign, which began in the 1950s, allowed women to "enter employment arenas that had been traditionally considered 'men's work'" (Jin, "Rethinking" 189). Moreover, it "became more pronounced during the Cultural Revolution when even rural

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<sup>3</sup>. "This metaphor, derived from the ancient Chinese mythology in which the goddess Nǚwa was said to have propped up the sky in order to save it from falling, graphically portrays an ideal situation in which men and women share equal responsibility in the affairs of the world" (Lee 1).

women began to achieve an ostensible equality with their male counterparts in agricultural work” (Jin, “Rethinking” 189). Some achievements the Iron Girls attained can be found in the constitution of the “Iron Girl brigades”, the “8 March Women’s Transportation Brigade”, and the brigades who laboured in the Shengli Oil Field (Jin, “Rethinking” 189). In these workplaces, women played significant roles in promoting the development of the economy of China at that time and were celebrated in Maoist-era propaganda as evidence that equality had been achieved.

Nevertheless, the opportunities provided for women to pursue non-traditional roles define gender equality as women’s ability to meet a male standard in the labour force, which means that the status quo remained unchanged: male activity still set the standard. Due to the neglect of the physical constraints of women, women who engaged in non-traditional heavy labour during this period subsequently suffered from injuries and chronic health problems such as back trauma and arthritis, which attests to the problem inherent in promoting equal performance of labour as gender equality (Jin, “Rethinking” 199). Therefore, during the Second-wave of feminism in China, although women obtained more access to participate in public activities, they still subject to a male standard. Under those circumstances, I argue that feminism does not mean that both men and women should engage in pursuing the same job; instead, it means that both men and women should have equal opportunities to access all types of activities in all spheres and display their competence in contexts where women’s action and potential may be assessed on their own merits, with reference to women’s experience and aspirations.

The current wave of feminism in China, associated with Third-wave feminism, emerged from the urban-based women's movement in the mid-1980s (Wesoky, 2002; Zhang and Wu, 1995) and is characterized by the increasing concern of women's economic and political rights. To protect women's rights, a variety of national and international events were held in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the establishment of the China Women's Development Foundation in 1988 and *The Fourth World Conference on Women* in Beijing in 1995.

An elaboration upon feminism concerning its definitions and development in both Western and Chinese contexts reveals a shared goal of feminists, which is to let both men and women's capabilities be equally recognized and evaluated according to their own realities, rather than promoting a male standard which requires women to meet, or vice versa. As gender inequality is a complex social problem that is a result of multiple social and cultural conditions, it requires an inter- or multidisciplinary approach to it. Characterized by an inter- and multidisciplinary nature, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will facilitate the process of advancing changes in the unequal portrayal of gender relations in news media. Therefore, I will provide a theoretical explanation of CDA.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

The emergence of a critical discourse perspective in linguistic studies has compensated for traditional linguistic approaches that are primarily theoretically-oriented. In traditional areas in Linguistics such as Syntax, linguists argued that the formal aspects of language that constitute language competence (a speaker's knowledge of language) could

exist independently from language performance (the actual use of language) (see Chomsky, 1957). In Pragmatics (see Levinson, 1983), although “the relation between language and context was considered, ... sentences and components of sentences were still regarded as the basic units” (Wodak and Meyer 5). In Sociolinguistics, more attention was paid to exploring the change in and variation of language along with social change or the change of the patterns of communicative interaction, and limited attention was paid to the role played by social power relationships in communication (see Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1972). Consequently, the lack of studies exploring how social structures shape the production and interpretation of texts started to draw linguists’ attention, which forecast the emergence of a new approach in linguistic studies (see de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981; also see Titscher *et al.*, 2000).

By the end of 1970s, along with the work *Language and Control* published in 1979 (see Fowler *et al.*, 1979), and *Language as Ideology* (see Kress and Hodge, 1979) at the same time, a new approach known as Critical Linguistics emerged. Critical Linguistics focuses on exploring how text is a site where power relationships can be constructed through the ideological use of language. By the 1990s, “the label CDA came to be used more consistently with this particular approach to linguistic analysis” and “CDA by that time was ‘emerging as a distinct theory of language, a radically different kind of linguistics’” (Wodak and Meyer 5). This different kind of linguistics centred on the degree to which a central aspect of CDA “is the attempt to understand the formation of the individual human being as a social individual in response to available ‘representational resources’” (Wodak and Meyer 6) that shape people’s ideology.

### Definition

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as Wang and Liu remark, is “an emerging method of discourse analysis ... [that] assimilates the results of multi-disciplinary scientific research in linguistics, psychology, sociology, media studies and so on” (1). Meanwhile, “[i]t attaches importance to all the non-literary discourses, but it takes news discourses as its main research object” (Wang and Liu 1). More importantly, CDA is a perspective or stance but not “a direction, school, or specialization next to the many other ‘approaches’ in discourse studies” (van Dijk, “News” 85).

Since CDA became a significant analytical approach in linguistics studies, it has been interpreted from different perspectives by critical discourse scholars. For example, Teun A. van Dijk is interested in exploring the “cognitive interface between the textual and social and that has been the distinctive feature of his work” (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 8). Specifically, van Dijk examines how “ideologies are also at play when language users engage in the ongoing construction of context as subjective, as well as group-sensitive, interpretations of the social situation”, and how “ideologies may influence the ways social attitudes are expressed in discourse structures” (van Dijk, “Discourse” 11). This dissertation is exactly an exploration of how a discriminatory gender ideology is being constructed in the representations of gender relations in Chinese news media and its influences on audiences’ interpretation of gender relations in China.

In contrast to van Dijk’s approach, Ruth Wodak is interested in “looking at racism that span decades” through an examination of the “continuities and differences” in bodies of

material (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 8). According to Wodak and Meyer, discourse is a product of history and it should be interpreted by locating it in time and space (3). Moreover, she argues that the social processes and structures at a particular historical period give rise to the production of texts, which thus requires individuals to interpret the meanings of texts by positioning themselves as historical subjects (Wodak and Meyer 3). Alternatively, Wodak's historical approach focuses on the interaction between historical context and the production of discourse in that context.

The other perspective from which CDA is being interpreted is represented by Norman Fairclough's social approach. According to Fairclough, CDA has been "increasingly focus[sing] on questions of social change", "order of discourse", and "interdiscursivity" (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 9). The term "order of discourse", as Fairclough explains, refers to the "particular articulations of discourses, genres and styles that are relatively stabilized around networks of social practices such as the field of media or politics" (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 9). In the context of this study, "orders of discourse" refers to the overarching discriminatory framework within which female athletes across various media outlets are being represented. In comparison, "interdiscursivity" is "a way of looking at a more concrete level, at the way in which particular texts or conversations, or interviews, draw upon and potentially rearticulate these more stable combinations of discourses, genres, and styles" (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 9). Therefore, "interdiscursivity" refers to the reiterations and



reinforcements of the ideological languages used in depicting male and female athletes in the news discourse.

Fairclough distinguishes “three types of values that formal features of language may have: experiential, relational, and expressive” (“Language” 112). To articulate the relations among the dimensions of meaning, the values of formal features, and the structural effects, Fairclough employs the following table (see table 2.1 below):

Table 2.1

Formal features: *experiential, relational and expressive values*

Dimensions of meaning	Values of features	Structural effects
Contents	Experiential	Knowledge/beliefs
Relations	Relational	Social relations
Subjects	Expressive	Social identities

Source: Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London and New York: Longman, 1989) 112.

Print.

As Fairclough explains, the experiential value of a formal feature is a clue to how the text producer experience the natural world and the contents that describe it express a type of knowledge or belief (“Language” 112). In comparison, the relational value of a formal feature is “a cue to the social relationships which are enacted via the text in the discourse” and it is “to do with *relations* and social relationships” (Fairclough, “Language” 112; emphasis

original). The expressive value of a formal feature is “a trace of and a cue to the producer’s evaluation (in the widest sense) of the bit of the reality it relates to” and it is related with subjects and social identities (Fairclough, “Language” 112). Moreover, Fairclough argues that “any given formal feature may simultaneously have two or three of these values” (“Language” 112). In this research, I will examine how the formal features of the news texts express a belief in gender inequality and enact an asymmetrical gender power relation between men and women through their semantic meanings.

In addition to the various conceptual frameworks within which CDA is interpreted, critical discourse scholars have also described the characteristics and the objectives that CDA aims to achieve. The following section will expound the characteristics and the objectives of CDA.

### **Characteristics and Objectives**

In spite of the fact that CDA has been interpreted differently by critical discourse scholars, a shared understanding of what CDA does is that it explores how discourse is a site where power struggle can be found (Wodak and Meyer 2). According to van Dijk, CDA is characterized by, firstly, the fact that it is concerned with social problems that are caused by the exercise of unequal power relationships (“Aims” 17). Thus, it has a political and social orientation. Secondly, CDA is a perspective/methodology, rather than a theory which has a fixed theoretical foundation (van Dijk, “Aims” 17). CDA is an inter- or multidisciplinary approach which borrows theories from a variety of disciplines in addressing social problems.

Thirdly, CDA studies both verbal and non-verbal discourses (van Dijk, “Aims” 18). In examining verbal discourse, it pays attention to “*all levels and dimensions of discourse*”, including “grammar (phonology, syntax, semantics), style, rhetoric, schematic organization, speech acts, pragmatic strategies, and those of interaction, among others” (van Dijk, “Aims” 18; emphasis original); in non-verbal discourse, it studies all semiotic signs such as pictures, sound, or gestures (van Dijk, “Aims” 18). Lastly but most importantly, CDA aims to uncover “the underlying *ideologies* that play a role in the reproduction of or resistance against dominance or inequality” (van Dijk, “Aims” 18; emphasis original) (also see Fairclough and Wodak).

The characteristics of CDA above demonstrate that CDA is distinguished by its attempt to explore any form of social injustice or social inequality constructed through the ideological use of verbal and/or non-verbal languages in a discourse. Therefore, critical discourse scholars endorse Habermas’s insight that “language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations ... are not articulated, ... language is also ideological” (259).

While CDA has a social and political orientation, it determines that its overriding objectives are to account for “the ways in which and extent to which social changes are changes in discourse ... and ... discourse ‘(re)constructs’ social life in processes of social change” (Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis” 76-77). Additionally, CDA also aims to:

[I]dentify through analysis the particular linguistic, semiotic and ‘interdiscursive’ features of ‘texts’ (in a broad sense) which are a part of processes of social

change, but in ways which facilitate the productive integration of textual analysis into multi-disciplinary research on change. (Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis” 76-77)

To rearticulate, CDA aims to change the unequal social power relationships through a change in discourse and if social power structures determine the production of discourse, discourse also changes social power structures through its ideological power.

In conducting CDA, critical discourse scholars draw upon a variety of key concepts in explaining how discourse enacts changes in social power relations. Consequently, the following section will focus on an expansion on some of the key concepts.

### **Key Concepts**

The key concepts that critical discourse scholars deploy in addressing how the ideological use of language influences people’s worldview are “discourse”, “ideology”, “hegemony”, and “power”. Despite the fact that the four key concepts are discussed and presented separately, they are inherently related to each other. However, beginning with an introduction to the concept of discourse is fundamental as it is the raw material that critical discourse scholars examine. Then I will demonstrate how ideology is a means through which power is constructed and sustained. Subsequently, I will examine how ideology is a mechanism through which the dominant class achieves its hegemonic control over the dominated. Lastly, I will expand on the concept of power as it is the ultimate result of the ideological use of language in discourse legitimated by the masses’ consent.

### *Discourse*

According to Fairclough, “discourse” is a form of “social practice” (“Language” 20) and it involves “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (24). In addition, “[t]he process includes in addition to the text the *process of production*, of which the text is a product, and the *process of interpretation*, for which the text is a resource” (Fairclough, “Language” 24; emphasis original). However, the analysis of discourse will not complete without considering the social conditions that shape the construction of discourse. Consequently, Fairclough argues that discourse also involves “social conditions, which can be interpreted as *social conditions of production*, and *social conditions of interpretation*” (“Language” 25; emphasis original). As an alternative, the critical study of discourse requires a simultaneous analysis of the relationship among “texts”, “interaction”, and “context” (Fairclough, “Language” 25). As is shown earlier in this chapter, the social and cultural foundations upon which gender relations are defined in Chinese and Western societies differ. Therefore, to change the unequal representations of gender relations in Chinese news discourse, it is important to situate the problem in Chinese culture.

As the aim of CDA is to change the discriminatory ideologies that discourse perpetuates, I will now explain how the dominant group achieves its ideological control of the dominated.

## *Ideology*

Ideology, according to sociologist John B. Thompson, refers to “the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical – what [he calls] ‘relations of domination’” (7). In other words, ideology, first, contains invisible meanings/beliefs that are constantly reinforced and normalized and second, it is a means to maintain an asymmetrical power relation between social groups. As van Dijk puts it, “ideologies play a role in the legitimization of power abuse by dominant groups” (“Politics” 729). When the viewpoints of the dominant group are being widely accepted by the dominated, the dominant achieves its ideological control over the dominated (van Dijk, “Politics” 729).

To exert an ideological control over the dominated, images, myths, ideas or concepts are all means which the dominant tends to employ in conveying its ideology. Thus, ideology is the conceptual relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Ferretter 94). Alternatively, ideology “is invariably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses a will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality” (Althusser, “For Marx” 234; emphasis original). Consequently, ideology involves an element of the unconscious and is a vehicle through which the dominant group “impose[s] on the vast majority of men” (Althusser, “For Marx” 233) its way of living and functioning.

The reliance on the ideological control of the dominated on the part of the dominant group, according to Althusser, is called the *Ideological State Apparatus* (ISA) (“Lenin” 142).

In comparison, reliance on the concrete physical forces such as police, military, and prisons are defined as the *Repressive State Apparatus* (RSA) (Althusser, “Lenin” 139). The two forms of control that the dominant group employs in maintaining its ruling are what Althusser calls “State Apparatus” (“Lenin” 137). In this research, news media are a form of the ISAs used to reinforce the ideology of gender inequality on the part of audiences.

Moreover, according to the Marxist Althusser, ideology has a variety of characteristics. Firstly, as ideology is not based on the actual relationships of people to their reality, the dominant class cannot overtly employ it to solidify its control over the dominated. Secondly, while the ISAs express the dominant class’s values, the dominated class also articulates its own (Ferretter 80). Therefore, the ISAs reflect the *class struggle* between the dominant and the dominated and both of them attempt to capture power (Ferretter 85; emphasis original). However, an equal social power relationship cannot be built if the dominated group employs a radical approach in overturning the dominant class’s viewpoint and positions its own as the governing ideology because by doing so, the dominated class’s ideology will become the ruling ideology and it will still be a practice of an unequal power relationship. Therefore, to establish an equal social power relationship, both groups’ identities and strengths should be equally recognized and given equal consideration. In the context of the construction of gender relationships in Chinese news discourse, even when women are given space in the media coverage, they fall short of real recognition, because the language of such recognition is incompatible with the language through which ideologies of female virtue are encoded.

While it is not to be understood as an objective scientific reality, “ideology [also] has a material existence” (Althusser, “Lenin” 165) and it “interpellates individuals as subjects” (170). By saying that ideology has a material existence, Althusser means that ideology always exists in the practices of an apparatus (hence institutional discourse, such as media or workplace discourse); nevertheless, it is “not an ideal phenomenon” (Ferretter 86) in that the various “‘ideas’ or ‘representations’, etc., which seem to make up ideology do not have an ideal (*idéale* or *idéelle*) or spiritual existence, but a material existence” (Althusser, “Lenin” 165). Put differently, ideology does not represent a material existence but can be found in it. For instance, the statement “All men are created equal” does not represent some material existence (or, alternatively, something concrete that we can see) called “All men are created equal” because it is merely a product of our consciousness or our mental functioning. However, this statement can be found being voiced in a variety of discourses such as televisions, speeches, and newspapers. As Ferretter puts it:

It is not because we hold certain beliefs that we construct ISAs; rather, it is because ISAs have been constructed that we hold certain beliefs. The material apparatus – the institution, with all its practices and rituals – governs the beliefs of its members. Ideas are not the property of individual subjects, ... but the result of the situation of those subjects, in class society, within a set of ISAs. (87)

To demonstrate, if a person has her own system of beliefs, then how that person acts should be in conformity with what she claims she believes in. However, “if a person behaves in a way that does not follow from his system of beliefs, then we suspect that he does not really



believe what he claims to believe. Rather, we suspect that he believes something else, on the basis of which he really acts” (Ferretter 87). In other words, an observation of behavior inconsistent with the ostensible ideology will prompt us to assume the hidden ideology the person has. This principle corresponds with key elements of the Burkean rhetoric featured in this study, where the identification of the speaker’s actual “attitude” is the key to her rhetorical criticism (as achieved through what Burke called “cluster criticism” or “key terms analysis” as will be introduced in Chapter 4). Specially, the distinctions between the ideological and the material existence of ideology reflects what Burke calls “motion” and “action” in a rhetorical context.

According to Burke, “action” is a term that refers to the motivational and ideological nature of human activities, while “motion” is the sheer “nonsymbolic [*sic*] operations of nature” (“On Symbols” 53). For instance, the change of the original waterway for the purpose of providing more water resource to nearby residents in an area is “action” because it is motivational and ideological; while the flow of water in its natural and original channel is “motion” as it is an activity which just happens without any purposeful operations on nature.

Moreover, Burke believes that “action” and “motion” both differ from and interrelate with each other. To expand on his thesis, Burke proposes three arguments:

- (1) There can be no action without motion – that is, even the ‘symbolic action’ of pure thought requires corresponding motions of the brain.
- (2) There can be motion without action. (For instance, the motions of the tides, of sunlight, of growth and decay.)

- (3) Action is not reducible to terms of motion. For instance, the ‘essence’ or ‘meaning’ of a sentence is not reducible to its sheer physical existence as sounds in the air or marks on the page, although material motions of some sort are necessary for the production, transmission, and reception of the sentence. (“On Symbols” 53-54)

As an alternative, “action” is an activity where we can find the rhetor’s intentions, while “motion” is a natural movement which happens spontaneously. Therefore, “ideology” (in Althusser’s term) and “action” (in Burke’s term) both reveal the motivational and symbolic use of language in altering the world. In this study, the unequal portrayal of female achievement is a reflection of “action” which aims at perpetuating the ideology of gender inequality and ought not to be confused with “motion” – which would correspond roughly to the genuine objective portrayal of female athletes’ performance as unalterable “natural fact”.

In addition to the characteristic of having a “material existence”, ideology interpellates individuals as subjects (Althusser, “Lenin” 173). According to Althusser, “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects [of certain type of ideology], by the functioning of the category of the subject” (“Lenin” 173). In saying so, Althusser means that first of all, “the most fundamental category of ideology – the category on which is founded all other ideological categories and concepts – is that of the ‘subject’” (Ferretter 88). In other words, the individual subject is the foundation and origin of ideas and beliefs. However, Althusser argues that individual subjects themselves are “‘subjected to the Subject’” (Ferretter 90). Otherwise put, the moment we become subjects of an ideology and

perceive ourselves as agents, we simultaneously “become subjects in the second sense – we become obedient and unresisting agents of the mode of production within which the ISAs to which we belong function” (Ferretter 90). Consequently, although we appear to be agents of our own ideology, we are actually conducting our actions in alignment with the interests and ideologies of the dominant groups, particularly as expressed through various forms of media which shape the public consciousness. In the context of this research, sports journalism presents itself as objective reporting of what athletes do, and the “average” reader may consider him/herself to be forming an independent opinion based on that reportage. However, if the reciprocal influence of journalist and reader is shaped by a common ideology regarding appropriate gendered behaviour, neither is free to conceptualize gendered behavior outside of what the ideology makes thinkable.

To conclude, Althusser presents ideology as an effective vehicle on which the dominant group may rely in influencing dominated groups. Nonetheless, ideology always works implicitly in influencing people’s worldview. The dominant group achieves its ideological control over the dominated when its ideology has become “common sense” for, and is widely accepted as such by, the dominated. This process, in Gramsci’s term, is how the consent form of “hegemony” (“Selections” 12) works. Therefore, it is important to expand on Antonio Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony”.

## *Hegemony*

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony originally sought to explain why the working class "in the late Twenties and Thirties, with the rise of Fascism and the failure of the Western European working-class movements, ... was not necessarily revolutionary; why it could, in fact, yield to Fascism" (Gitlin 251). According to Jasinski, it is not the "physical coercion or repression" that the dominant class exercises on the dominated that ultimately conquered the working class (283); instead, it was the "bourgeois domination of the thought, the common sense, the life-ways, and everyday assumptions of the working class" that brought failure to socialist movements in Western Europe (Gitlin 251).

Similar to Althusser's terms of RSA and ISA in classifying the *State Apparatus*, Gramsci uses "coercion" and "consent" to describe how the ruling class exerts hegemonic control on the oppressed (Simon 24). While the former form of hegemony can be achieved through "juridical" (Gramsci, "Selections" 12) forces (such as armies, prisons, and police), the latter is realized through the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (12). In other words, the consent form of hegemony is achieved when "the mechanisms through which dominant groups in society succeed in persuading subordinate groups to accept their own moral, political and cultural values and their institutions through ideological means" (Mayr 13).

An effective way by which the dominant class maintains a stable social order is to "[generate] consent to its parameters through the production and distribution of ideological

texts that define social reality for the majority of the people” (Cloud 117). Consequently, it is “because CDA explores how discourse constructs ideological (hegemonic) attitudes, opinions and beliefs that often appear as common sense that [hegemony] is such an important concept” (Mayr 13) in exploring how the dominant class makes effort to maintain the social order through the production of ideological texts.

According to Fairclough, “[a]n order of discourse can be seen as the discursive facet of the contradictory and unstable equilibrium which constitutes a hegemony, and the articulation and re-articulation of orders of discourse is correspondingly one stake in hegemonic struggle” (“Discourse” 93). However, “discursive practice”, as Fairclough continues, as “a facet of hegemonic struggle ... contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation not only of the existing order of discourse ..., but also through that of existing social and power relations” (Fairclough, “Discourse” 93). Consequently, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony “provides a fruitful framework for conceptualizing and investigating political and ideological dimensions of discursive practice” (Fairclough, “Discourse” 67) given that an asymmetrical power relation is usually being built up through the ideological dimension of discourse.

In addition, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony also “provides a way of theorizing change in relation to the evolution of power relations which allows a particular focus upon discursive change but at the same time a way of seeing it as contributing to and being shaped by wider processes of change” (Fairclough, “Discourse” 92). Put differently, an endeavour to change the unequal social power relations through a change in discourse requires a change in the

ideologies that discourse perpetuates; meanwhile, a change in the discursive representation of power relations is inalienable from a consideration of the social conditions that determine the production of discourse. Similarly, a change in the ideology of gender inequality in Chinese news discourse must account for the influences of Confucian gender traditions that condition representations of gender relations in modern China.

In introducing the previous key CDA concepts, “power” is a concept that has constantly been associated with, which shows that all the efforts that the dominant group makes in controlling the dominated group’s worldview is to sustain its ruling power. Therefore, an expansion on the concept of power will explain the nature of the asymmetrical relation between the dominant and the dominated groups.

### *Power*

According to John B. Thompson, “power” refers to “the ability to act in pursuit of one’s aims and interests: an individual has the power to act, the power to intervene in the sequence of events and to alter their course” (151). In addition, power is formed when an individual or group has “privileged access to” a variety of “valuable social resources such as wealth, jobs, status” or any other “preferential access to public discourse and communication” (van Dijk, “Discourse” 66). Accordingly, “when particular individuals or groups of individuals are endowed with power in a durable way which excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to, other individuals or groups of individuals,

irrespective of the basis upon which such exclusion is carried out” (Thompson 151), a systematic asymmetrical power relation is formed.

In terms of the site where power exists in discourse, Fairclough distinguishes “power in discourse” and “power behind discourse” (“Language” 43). While “power in discourse” means that “discourse is a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted”, “power behind discourse” indicates a shift of the “focus to how orders of discourse, as dimensions of the social orders of social institutions or societies, are themselves shaped and constituted by relations of power” (Fairclough, “Language” 43). This study explores how the latter plays roles in reinforcing a hierarchical gender power through an analysis of news discourse (see Chapter 4).

Regardless of where power can be found in discourse, it is not language itself that has power, as language is simply a series of words sequenced in a grammatical order; rather, it is the ideological use of language that makes it powerful (Wodak and Meyer 10). Language can exert both “discourse control” and “mind control” on the audience (van Dijk, “Discourse” 9). According to van Dijk, “discourse control” consists of the constraints imposed on people by authorities such as government, police, and mass media concerning not only what people can speak and write but also when, where, why, to whom, and how (“Discourse” 9). However, when the aim is to exercise an implicit control on the public’s “knowledge, opinions, attitudes, ideologies, as well as other personal or social representations” (van Dijk, “Discourse” 9), an individual or institution will employ “mind control”. Therefore, power exists in the ideological use of language.

Based on a theoretical introduction to CDA, I will expand on how a feminist perspective has been taken into consideration by critical discourse scholars in their research, as feminism is a theoretical feature of this study.

### **Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

In the past decade or so, scholars of different branches of critical discourse studies have started to employ a feminist perspective in their research, to the extent that one can speak of a specifically feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (abbreviated as feminist CDA henceforth) (Lazar 2). Before feminist CDA emerged, “feminist debates and theorization since the late 1980s have shown that speaking of ‘women’ and ‘men’ in universal, totalizing terms is problematic” since “[g]ender as a category intersects with, and is shot through by, other categories of social identity such as sexuality, ethnicity, social position and geography” (Lazar 1). Put differently, to explore how gender relation is being defined in a society, one cannot ignore the interaction among complex factors such as the social and cultural gender traditions, ethnic identity, or even the geographical influence.

Consequently, to investigate how discourse is a place where an asymmetrical gender power relationship can be constructed, a group of scholars in CDA started to employ a feminist perspective in their analyses, thus giving rise to feminist CDA. According to Michelle M. Lazar, feminist CDA “advance[s] a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a (hierarchically) gendered social order” (1). Therefore, feminist CDA provides scholars of critical discourse



studies a new angle from which the particular social problem – gender discrimination – can be examined.

Since a feminist perspective has been employed in CDA studies, a variety of areas of feminist studies in CDA have also been established. Among them, we can find feminist stylistics (see Mills, 1995), feminist pragmatics (see Christie, 2000), and feminist conversation analysis (see Kitzinger, 2000). The emergence of the various areas of feminist studies in CDA has challenged the traditional male-focused approach to critical discourse studies and it provides a “neutral and objective inquiry” (Lazar 2) into the exploration of gender issues. Using a feminist CDA perspective, I will explore how the representations of male and female athletes in news discourse in China perpetuates an ideology of gender inequality in its internalization of the hierarchical Confucian perception of gender relations.

CDA aims to reveal the ideologies that discourse perpetuates through an examination of the interactions between text, the process of production of text, and the social conditions that determine the production of text. Rhetorical criticism, on the other hand, helps to examine the rhetorical process in which the rhetor, audience, and message interact in constructing an ideology and in which the audience is assumed to play a role in its own persuasion. Therefore, the following section provides a theoretical introduction to rhetorical criticism.

## *Rhetorical Criticism*

CDA and rhetorical criticism have a different process of identifying the ideology/attitude that a discourse perpetuates. However, the shared concern between the two approaches with exploring how text producer and text consumers interact under a particular social circumstance entails that the two approaches can work together in achieving such a goal. Consequently, this section will deploy a parallel structure in its elaboration upon rhetorical criticism so as to examine how it will contribute, together with CDA, to the identification of the discriminatory gender ideology Chinese news discourse perpetuates. Specifically, I will define rhetorical criticism, describe its overall characteristics and objectives, and discuss the terminologies that rhetorical scholars employ in conducting rhetorical criticism.

### **Definition**

To understand rhetorical criticism, it is necessary to first shed light on the concept of *rhetoric*. A definition of rhetoric can be found in Aristotle who describes rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle; trans. Roberts 6). However, in its thousands of years of development, rhetoric has been defined and redefined in far more diverse terms. For example, according to Barry Brummett, *rhetoric* “has been a term that can be applied both to what people do and to systems of knowledge or explanation about what people do” (“Rhetoric” 46). In other words, rhetoric is not only a technique but also a theory that can be used to explain the motives behind people’s

communicational behavior. According to Burke, however, *rhetoric* is “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (“A Rhetoric” 43). Therefore, only human beings are capable of using words “to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (Burke, “A Rhetoric” 41), which is the theoretical foundation upon which the interpretation of the symbolic representations of male and female athletes is built.

The method of exploring how rhetoric induces actions in people then is called “rhetorical criticism.” As Brock *et al.* define it, rhetorical criticism is “a form of discourse” which “can be viewed as a series of components, with each component influencing the final product” (“Methods” 15). Specifically, rhetorical criticism “is a qualitative method that is designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artefacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (Foss, “Rhetorical Criticism” 6). Thus, in rhetorical criticism, a critic “is to indicate, to point out, to draw the attention of others to, a particular case or type of symbolic inducement” (Brock *et al.*, “Methods” 16). In the context of this research, by analyzing the images that depict male and female athletes, I aim to draw media producers’, audiences’, as well as female athletes own attention to the symbolic meanings with which the images are associated.

As rhetorical criticism also has its unique characteristics and objectives, I will now enlarge on what has made rhetorical criticism an indispensable theoretical framework within which this research has to be conducted.

## Characteristics and Objectives

According to Theresa Enos, “rhetorical criticism ... has romantic as well as classical characteristics” (32) because recent criticism influenced by Richards and Burke has moved outward from the narrow approach of the new critical method to a more inclusive and open methodology. Generally, rhetorical criticism is composed of three dimensions: “systematic analysis as the act of criticism”, “acts and artifacts as the objects of criticism”, and “understanding rhetorical processes as the purpose of criticism” (Foss, “Rhetorical Criticism” 6-7). In Brock *et al.*’s words, the three dimensions can be correspondingly described as “description, interpretation, and evaluation” of the product or process of symbolic inducement (“Methods” 16). Moreover, since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Brummett, “Rhetoric” 50-52), rhetorical criticism has considered the “interaction between the work and the consciousness of the reader (Enos 32) in the process of symbolic inducement, which in Burke’s words is the “coaching of an attitude” (“Attitudes” 322).

An objective shared among rhetorical scholars in conducting rhetorical criticism is to examine the relationships among speaker, audience, and message, in the context of what rhetoricians call the “rhetorical triangle” (Aristotle; trans. Roberts 7) established in the tradition of Aristotle’s rhetoric. In terms which are easily associated with this “rhetorical triangle”, Aristotle distinguished the avenues by which people are persuaded: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, which are usually called the “three modes of appeal” (see Killingsworth, 2005). *Ethos* deals with the speaker’s credibility, including good character, good judgment, and good will of the speaker; *pathos* refers to the concern of the audience’s values in the rhetor’s

persuasive act; and *logos* is concerned with the degree to which the message's construction "makes sense" to the audience, independent of what they think of the speaker or how their values position them to respond to the speaker or the general drift of the message.

In addition, Aristotle also identified an additional element that functions in persuasion which he calls the *enthymeme* (Keith and Lundberg 37). According to Keith and Lundberg, "Aristotle called legitimately persuasive arguments that weren't formally valid **enthymemes**. These involve good reasoning but are missing some steps in the logic. Enthymemes are parallel to syllogisms, but simpler and more flexible" (37; emphasis original). They continue to give an example, "Bob is a student, therefore Bob is registered for courses." (Keith and Lundberg 37). As Keith and Lundberg explained, "[we] can leave out the step 'All students register for courses' if everyone in the audience will know it. This is a key feature of enthymemes; they are transparent for only their target audiences, since they take advantage of audience knowledge" (37). As the analyses of the news discourse in this research will show (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), the ambiguity created between praise and containment of female athletes requires the audience to complete the missing information on whether the athletes are more competent in playing traditional domestic roles or in displaying sports skills.

Building on the concepts of the rhetorical triangle and the three modes of appeals, Bitzer proposed his concept of "rhetorical situation." According to Bitzer, a genuine rhetorical situation is composed of three elements – *rhetorical exigence*, *rhetorical audience*, and *constraints*. *Rhetorical exigence* is the imperfection that is capable of being positively

modified through communication (Bitzer 6); *rhetorical audience* is someone “who [is] capable of being influenced by discourse and of being [a] mediator of change” (Bitzer 7); *constraints* refers to any “persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (Bitzer 8). In this study, the unquestioned and unexamined acceptance of an ideology of gender discrimination constitutes the primary rhetorical exigence. Moreover, the rhetorical exigence requires the rhetorical audiences (i.e. news media, audiences, and female athletes themselves) to enhance their awareness of the ideology of gender inequality induced by the symbolic meanings of the images in the news discourse.

Overall, contemporary rhetorical criticism is concerned with a simultaneous analysis of how the three components – speaker, message, and audience – interact in producing symbolic actions “whose foundation is rhetoric – the study or use of language symbols that persuade through identification” (Enos 30). In this research, the examination of the symbolic use of images in portraying male and female athletes will provide us a view of how the rhetor (understood collectively as the news media), motivated by a discriminatory gender attitude towards female athletes, induces cooperation in the audience by appealing to corresponding attitudes which audiences find familiar and reassuring.

Based on an elaboration upon rhetorical criticism, I will examine the key concepts that rhetorical scholars deploy in explaining the rhetorical process through which a rhetor’s attitude is communicated. Because Kenneth Burke is the key figure in contemporary theory

which focuses on attitude and identification as applied in this study, I will focus particularly on how he defines the rhetorical terms.

### **Key Concepts**

Burke uses rhetorical concepts such as “motive”, “terministic screen”, “identification” and “persuasion”, as well as “attitude” in explaining how a rhetor induces predisposition toward action on the part of audiences. The key concepts are introduced separately. Nevertheless, it does not follow that a rhetor deploys only one rhetorical strategy in a rhetorical satiation. Instead, she may draw upon a variety of the rhetorical techniques at the same time in establishing a shared worldview with the audience. Due to the fact that “motive” is a site where a rhetor’s purpose of using rhetoric exists, I will first elaborate upon how Burke defines “motive”.

### *Motive*

In the beginning of his book *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke says that to answer the question of “what is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it” is to find out the “basic forms of thought which, in accordance with the nature of the world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives” (“A Grammar” xv). Motive therefore is the primary driving force of all the actions that people take in responding to the world.

Motive, usually defined as one's purposes or goals of doing certain things, entails more complex meanings in Burke's rhetorical theory. As Hauser observes, Burke "changes motive from a psychological concept that must be inferred to a vocabulary concept that can be observed" (129). Specifically, Burke describes motives as being embodied in "terminologies" or "vocabularies" ("Permanence" 20-21), and argues that "we must always be admonished to remember, not that an experiment flatly and simply reveals *reality*, but rather that it *reveals only such reality as is capable of being revealed by this particular kind of terminology*" ("A Grammar" 313; emphasis original). Burke's definition of motive reveals that motive resides in a type of "entelechia term" which is "a *summing-up* of many motivational strands. And though *on its face* it reduces a whole complexity of terms to one apparently simple term, the people who used it may have been quite aware of many other meanings subsumed in it, but not explicitly proclaimed" (Burke, "A Rhetoric" 110; emphasis original; also see Chapter 2 for an elaboration upon "entelechy").

Any terms we use to summarize our motives, as Burke states, "will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" ("A Grammar" xv; emphasis original). Therefore, any human activities that involve motives cannot avoid answering the five questions because "all statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of them and to terminate in them" (xvi). This "pentad" (Burke, "Attitudes" 393-394) and the 20 ratios formed by pairing any two of them (such as scene-act ratio, scene-agent ratio, act-scene ratio, agent-scene ratio, etc.) constitute the basis of Burke's theory of dramatism. However, as



Burke states, “attitude” would have been the sixth term in his “pentad” (see Chapter 2), thus making the “pentad” a “hexad”, as attitude is in a sense prerequisite to “acts” (“Attitudes” 393-394). In this research, I will analyse, inside the cluster analysis, how the ratio formed by the two pentadic elements “act” and “attitude” in the visual representations of male and female athletes in the news discourse reveals the undermining and confining of female agency in claiming success while affirming males’ agency (see Chapter 6).

Another concept by which a rhetor’s attitude can be shown in her use of rhetoric is what Burke calls “terministic screens”. Therefore, I will discuss how a rhetor’s use of vocabularies is a reflection of her “terministic screens”.

### *Terministic Screens*

Burke states that the vocabularies we use are a reflection of our “terministic screens” (“Language” 45). A “terministic screen”, according to Blakesley, “functions like a framing of experience by singling out or highlighting certain aspects for focused attention” (95). More importantly, “terministic screens *enable* our observations, so the angle of approach we take to phenomena through our vocabularies sets limits on what observations are possible” (Blakesley 95; emphasis original). As an alternative, the language that we use and the angles we take in representing the world are a reflection of our motives and in turn, how we perceive the world determines the vocabularies we choose in depicting the world.

As Burke also puts it, humans “seek for vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any

*selections* of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality” (“A Grammar” 59; emphasis original). For instance, although the vocabularies *kill*, *murder*, *assassinate*, and *execute* all refer to causing the termination of one’s life, the meaning each connotes differs. Specifically, *kill* indicates a brutal action, *murder* has an intense and negative connotation, *assassinate* contains a political motivation, *execute* expresses the legality of killing – a killing conducted in accordance with some code of conduct. Therefore, to reflect the nature of the means by which a person is caused to die, a rhetor selects a term that not only reveals the rhetor’s attitude toward what is being labelled, but seeks to induce a compatible attitude in the audience. Accordingly, the selection of the term diverts audiences’ attention from the rhetor’s true motive of using the term to a focus on the surface meaning the term communicates.

If recognizing the use of terministic screens helps us identify the attitude which motivates a rhetor’s use of language, and if we see coaching the same attitude in the audience as the rhetor’s purpose, then we can see the fostering of identification on the basis of shared attitudes as the primary goal of rhetorical activity. Consequently, the subsequent section will expound the rhetorical concepts of “identification” and “persuasion”.

### *Identification and Persuasion*

As Burke illustrates, two people are identified with each other if they share the same interests (“A Rhetoric” 20). However, one can also “*identify himself* with another even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so”

(Burke, "A Rhetoric" 20; emphasis original). As argued earlier, rhetorical criticism aims to explore how rhetor, audiences, and messages interact in producing symbolic actions through identification (see Chapter 2). Therefore, identification is a full display of how a rhetor "consubstantiates" (Burke, "A Rhetoric" 21) with audiences through the employment of representative forms such as "speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea" (55) where attitudes can be constructed. When audience's attitudes are consubstantiated with the rhetor's ideology, they are being motivated to act in accordance with a shared attitude.

The concept of identification is always talked about together with "persuasion" in rhetorical studies due to the fact that both express an ultimate effect of the use of rhetoric on audiences. Just like Burke's use of the term "motivation" is more complicated than the conventional understanding of the term would suggest, so is his definition of "persuasion" because it exceeds the conventional understanding which defines that persuasion as merely based on the use of explicit and identifiable words. While traditionally "persuasion" is the objective of rhetoric, Burke's theories challenge that assumption, subordinating persuasion to larger strategies and motivations rooted in a deeper process of identification. According to Burke, "persuasion" is "normally thought to involve explicit appeals and manipulation" and it "involves choice, will" ("A Rhetoric" 50), and thus is different from identification which "allows for an unconscious factor as well" (Blakesley 15). In other words, while persuasion works on an explicit level of engaging audiences' attention with the rhetor's viewpoint, identification works more on a subtle level.

While “identification” differs from “persuasion”, they are means to achieve each other in a rhetorical action. As Burke remarks, on one hand, “a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests”; on the other hand, “the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience” (“A Rhetoric” 46). Having the audiences identified with the rhetor’s worldview is the purpose of using rhetoric and it is in line with Gramsci’s theory of the consent form of hegemony.

Gramsci’s attention to the role of consent in his “hegemony” is in some level similar to Burke’s “identification”. As discussed earlier, the consent form of hegemony as Gramsci defines it functions as “a relation, not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership” (Simon 24). In rhetorical studies, the concept of hegemony has been defined as “a *condition in process* in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class fractions) does not merely *rule* a society but *leads* it through the exercise of ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ [(Gramsci, “Hegemony” 75)]” (Storey 79; emphasis original). Therefore, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in rhetorical studies has helped to explain how a rhetor “consubstantiates” (Burke, “A Rhetoric” 21) audiences with his interests through the use of symbolic actions.

Similarly, Jasinski argues that “[r]hetorical and communication scholars have seized the concept of hegemony and begun to explore the way in which communication helps to generate this condition” (284). Examples can be found in studies on the masculinist hegemony that is being perpetuated in popular television programs (see Dow, 1990; Hanke,

1990; Trujillo, 1991) and that explores the “hegemonic nature of news media” (Jasinski 284; also see Carragee, 1993). In the context of this study, when a masculinist and hierarchal gender ideology recurs in the coverage of gender relations between male and female athletes in news media, the audience will be identified with the media’s ideology of gender inequality. When an audience is identified with the rhetor’s ideology, he is meanwhile identified with the rhetor’s attitude. Therefore, the last rhetorical concept to be discussed is “attitude”.

### *Attitude*

*Attitude*, as Burke defines, is “an incipient act, a leaning or inclination” (“A Rhetoric” 50). While it “can be the *substitute* for an act, it can likewise be the *first step towards* an act” (Burke, “A Grammar” 236; emphasis original). Therefore, “if we arouse in someone an attitude of sympathy towards something, we may be starting him on the road towards overtly sympathetic action with regard to it” (Burke, “A Grammar” 236). An example can be found in advertisers and propagandists’ inducement of audiences’ actions in shaping appropriate attitudes towards the commodities or viewpoints they are merchandising (Burke, “A Grammar” 236). Alternatively, “attitude” in a rhetorical context is the instrumental dimension of ideology, in which conscious and unconscious beliefs and perceptions form the basis of action/behaviour. Therefore, every perception probably includes a response in the form of incipient action (Richards 98).

Similar to the interest in a feminist perspective by scholars in CDA, rhetorical scholars have also taken into consideration a feminist orientation towards addressing how a

rhetor identifies the audience with her discriminatory gender attitude through the symbolic use of language. To explain how feminist rhetorical scholars commit themselves to the achievement of gender equality, I will offer a discussion on feminist Rhetorical Criticism.

### **Feminist Rhetorical Criticism**

In the last four decades or so, there has been an increasing concern over the issue of gender inequality in rhetorical studies, thus giving rise to the emergence of feminist rhetorical theories (Campbell, 1973; Foss, 1989; Foss *et al.*, 1999; Rakow, 2009).

According to Meyer, feminist rhetorical criticism refers to the *commitment to reflexive analysis and critique of any kind of symbol use that orients people in relation to other people, places, and practices on the basis of gendered realities or gendered cultural assumptions* (3; emphasis original). The attention paid to the issue of gender inequality in rhetorical studies, as Showalter puts it, is “[o]ne of the most striking changes in the humanities in the 1980s” (1). However, a feminist perspective employed in conducting rhetorical criticism “is not just another method of reading texts. Nevertheless, it has proved an incredibly productive way of reading” (Storey 136). Therefore, feminist rhetorical criticism has allowed us an opportunity to examine how a traditional heterosexual and masculinist ideology works in the symbolic representations of gender relations.

Several pioneering works marked that feminist rhetorical criticism was an established field of study (Foss *et al.*, “Feminist” 15). Among these works, three essays and a book are considered as the most representative texts (Foss *et al.*, “Feminist” 15). In particular,

Campbell's (1973) essay "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" is regarded, by most feminist rhetorical scholars, as "the beginning for critical discussions of feminist rhetoric because it draws attention to women as communicators within rhetorical frames" (Meyer 1). The other two essays that are as well of great importance are "Women's Speech: Separate but Unequal?" by Kramarae (1974) and "The Womanization of Rhetoric" by Gearhart (1979). The book is *Language and Woman's Place* by Lakoff (1975).

According to Foss and Griffin, most rhetorical theories perpetuate a patriarchal assumption and represent the world according to white male criteria, which has resulted in the neglect of women's concerns (331). For instance, in her essay "Can this Marriage be Saved? Reclaiming Burke for Feminist Scholarship", Japp argues that in Burke, there is "an indispensable array of guerrilla tactics for survival in a field of masculinist symbols" (113). However, she also argues that there are "explicit and implicit visions of human communication as a continual striving for mastery and dominance, a vision that permeates Burke" (Japp 127). In like manner, as Campbell puts it, "[men's] speeches and writings, from antiquity to present, are studied and analyzed by historians and rhetoricians ... Women have no parallel rhetorical history. Indeed, for much of their history, women have been prohibited from speaking" ("Man" 2). Consequently, to "discover whether existing rhetorical theories account for women's experiences and perspectives and to construct alternative theories that acknowledge and explain women's practices in the construction and use of rhetoric" (Foss and Griffin 331), a feminist perspective in rhetorical studies is essential as it "transforms rhetorical constructs and theories" (Foss, "Rhetorical" 155).

Nevertheless, the hierarchical gender relation will not change if feminist rhetorical scholars themselves employ a patriarchal assumption in interpreting the rhetorical representations of women. As Biesecker puts it, an “accumulation of texts does not guarantee our ways of knowing will change when the grounds for their inclusion and, likewise, our ways of deciphering them, remain the same” (145). Thus, feminist rhetorical scholars need to “theorize alternative reading practices in order to discover other possible configurations of gender, and thus other possible meanings” (Miller 371). Similarly, the achievements of female athletes in China cannot be properly acknowledged while the ideology permeating the reportage is motivated by attitudes incompatible with such acknowledgement.

The theoretical expansions on both CDA and rhetorical criticism demonstrate that as an effective means of exerting ideological control over people’s minds, discourse plays significant roles in shaping and reshaping social power relationships. In the last section of this chapter, I will account for how critical discourse scholars and rhetorical scholars have interpreted the interrelationships between language and society.

### *Relationships between Language and Society*

In CDA, theorists talk about the relationships between discourse and society. In comparison, in rhetorical analysis, rhetorical scholars explore the relationship between symbols and society. In spite of the fact that theorists employ different terms in the two fields of study, both focus on how the ideological and symbolic use of the verbal and non-verbal languages affects audiences’ worldview. Specifically, the distinction between CDA and



rhetorical analysis lies in that while the former quantifies linguistic and semiotic data as markers of ideology within a discourse, the latter is interested in the symbolic dimension of the interpretive act, examining discourse to find how the exchange of symbolic signs becomes meaningful to the parties involved. The following two sections will explore in detail the interrelation between language/symbols and society.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective**

As introduced earlier, discourse and society are interrelated (Fairclough, “Language” 23). As Fairclough puts it, “being determined by social structures, discourse has effects upon social structures and contributes to the achievement *of* social continuity or social change” (“Language” 37; emphasis original). Discourse is thus a form of social practice which is determined by social structures; meanwhile, it can change the existing social power relations through its power of exerting ideological control on audiences. Accordingly, discourse is a site of power struggle between the dominant and the dominated.

As Fairclough illustrates, even in the family sphere where we can isolate ourselves most from the influences of the society, the language we use is also conditioned by the social conventions that apply to family context and the improper use of the language in this context can also lead to a change in the family relations (“Language” 23). For instance, in a Chinese family context, a child cannot address his/her parents or parents by their names but only using the kinship terms “father/dad”, “mother/mom”, or “grandfather/grandpa”, or “grandmother/grandma”. It would be considered very disrespectful if a child addressed the

senior generations their individual names. However, it might not be considered so if a child did so in a Western family context; in fact, some parents encourage their children to call the parents by their given names rather than refer to them as “Mom” or “Dad.” Clearly, the way people use language is not only determined by social conditions, but also produces corresponding social effects. Therefore, to explore how discourse perpetuates an unequal social power relationship,

[O]ne is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analyzing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures. (Fairclough, “Language” 26)

Any effort to examine how discourse perpetuates an unequal social power relationship cannot neglect accounting for the social and cultural conditions in which discourse is produced. By the same token, the exploration of the perpetuation of gender inequality in Chinese news discourse has to consider the social and cultural traditions that determine the production and reception of a discriminatory news discourse.

Different from critical discourse scholars who are concerned with bringing changes to existing asymmetrical social power structures through a change in discourse, rhetorical scholars explore how the rhetor and the audience interact and how the rhetor identifies audiences with her. The next section will account for the relationship between symbols and society as Kenneth Burke describes it.

## Rhetorical Perspective

Rhetorical articulation of the relationships between symbols and society can be found in Burke's (1966) scholarly work *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. According to Burke, human beings are "symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal[s]" ("Language" 16). By saying so, Burke means that "[t]here is a principle of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with this nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle" ("Language" 17). In addition, Burke believes that "[a] given terminology contains various *implications*, and there is a corresponding 'perfectionist' tendency for [mankind] to attempt carrying out those implications" ("Language" 19; emphasis original). Moreover, "principle of perfection" is innate in a rhetor when she uses rhetoric and it is near to "the Aristotelian concept of 'entelechy,' the notion that each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind" (Burke, "On Symbols" 71), which Burke equates with the "finishedness of which that kind is capable" ("A Rhetoric" 14).

As a symbolic action, language is a place where the implications can be found. When used rhetorically, language forms a "rhetorical discourse" which "indicates the [possible] presence of a rhetorical situation" (Bitzer 1). In addressing the relationships between rhetorical discourse and rhetorical situation, Bitzer argues that "[w]hile the existence of a rhetorical address is a reliable sign of the existence of situation, it does not follow that a situation exists only when the discourse exists" (2). For instance, as Bitzer says, "[e]ach reader probably can recall a specific time and place when there was opportunity to speak on

some urgent matter, and after the opportunity was gone he created in private thought the speech he should have uttered earlier in the situation” (2). Therefore, it reveals that “situations are not always accompanied by discourse. Nor should we assume that a rhetorical address gives existence to the situation; on the contrary, it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence” (Bitzer 2). Similarly, in this research, the unequal representations of female athletes in the news discourse constitutes the rhetorical discourse which indicates the existence of the hierarchical gender order in Chinese society. It is the existence of the rhetorical situation that makes it urgent to call for the formation of discourse which can depict female athletes on an equal basis.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, both CDA and rhetorical studies recognize the determining role of the existing social power relations in the production of discourse. However, as Fairclough argues, discourse can contribute to social changes (“Language” 37). Based on this principle, this research will explore how a change in the unequal representations of female athletes in Chinese news discourse will contribute to a change in the unequal gender relations in the area of sports in China.

With a theoretical foundation being given in this chapter, the following chapter will review how existing feminist research in CDA and rhetorical studies have been conducted so as to reveal the significance of exploring gender inequality in the area of sports.

## CHAPTER 3

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews existing research on the exploration of gender relationships in both Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and rhetorical criticism. It begins with a review of major feminist works that focus on the representation of Chinese women. Then it examines relevant studies on gender relations in CDA. Using a parallel structure to the review of CDA, I will explore research on gender relations in rhetorical criticism. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings of the literature review.

The principal databases consulted in conducting the literature review were the University Library of the University of Saskatchewan and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Despite the fact that most of the literature reviewed date from prior to the end of 2012 to the time when this research finished its data collection, an effort has been made to include relevant materials published during the writing period.

#### *Review of Major Feminist Works on the Representations of Chinese Women*

The literature reviewed in this section was identified by using key words such as “Chinese feminism”, “studies on Chinese feminism”, “studies on Chinese women”, “studies on gender relations in China”, and other close variations. A review of the literature on the depiction of Chinese women in major feminist studies in the international community and in China reveals that there are many differences regarding the approaches and the topics

examined by feminist scholars. However, a shared characteristic between the two is that neither have paid enough attention to the exploration of how Chinese female athletes are represented in news media.

### **Studies Worldwide**

Major feminist scholarly works in the international community on the exploration of the representations of Chinese women are concerned largely with a theoretical elaboration upon Chinese feminism with regard to its historical development and its social and cultural roots. Among the works, some focus broadly on the exploration of Chinese feminism and women's liberation in China (see Andors, 1983; Wesoky, 2002; Barlow, 2004; Ko and Wang, 2007; Liu *et al.*, 2013). Some focus on the discussion of Chinese women's gender status in specific time periods (Croll, 1995; Wang, 2004; Hershatter, 2007) or on how Chinese women's gender status has changed along with time (see Kristeva, 1986; Tao, 2004). Moreover, there are also scholars who are interested in exploring the social and cultural roots of gender relationships in Chinese society with particular emphasis on Confucianism (see Lee, 1994; Rosenlee, 2006).

A review of existing scholarship shows that gender discrimination against women in China has been of wide concern for scholars around the world. While popular and social media has commented widely on the role of gender and cultural stereotyping in the context of

Chinese female athletes (for instance, Anna Chen's<sup>4</sup> and Michael Burke's<sup>5</sup> news articles), thus far there has been little in-depth scholarly attention paid to how gender relations are defined in the field of sports in China. Among the existing works, notable studies included Yunxiang Gao's (2013) *Sporting Gender: Women Athletes and Celebrity-making during China's National Crisis, 1931-45* and a chapter in Susan Brownell's (1995) *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* that discuss gender and sports.

### **Studies in China**

Scholarly feminist works that focus on the representations of Chinese women by scholars in China share both similarities with and differences from those in other parts of the world regarding the topics. Specifically, Chinese scholars, like those in other parts of the world, also put emphasis on exploring the history and development of Chinese feminism/feminist movements (see Li, 2011; Liu and Liu, 2012), the change of Chinese women's social status along with the changes of social situations in China (see Zheng and

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<sup>4</sup>. British journalist Anna Chen's article "The monsterring of swimmer Ye Shiwen says much about declining superpowers" criticizes the unfounded doping accusations levelled at Ye by the executive director of the American Swimming Coaches Association, Leonard, arguing that Leonard's position perpetuates Western stereotypes of "treacherous" Asians. The extent to which such stereotypes further deny Ye's agency in her achievement is striking. See the news article at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/02/swimmer-ye-shiwen-declining-superpowers>.

<sup>5</sup>. American journalist Michael Burke referred to a variety of cases in revealing the sexist and racial judgement of Chinese female athletes in the West in his news article "London 2012: an [*sic*] Olympics without controversy ... almost". See the news article at: <http://theconversation.com/london-2012-an-olympics-without-controversy-almost-8811>.

Tao, 2005; Liu *et al.*, 2012; Chen and Qin, 2015), and Chinese women's social status at any particular time (see Liu, 2014). However, Chinese scholars are also interested in exploring the issue of gender discrimination in the workplace (see Li, 2010) and in the labour market (see Zhang, 2010), both of which reveal the disempowered financial status of women when they are competing with their male counterparts.

In addition, scholars in China have also examined how gender discrimination in the area of sports has hindered female athletes' success. However, the available representative scholarly work can only be found in Dong Jinxia's (2003) *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China: Holding up More than Half the Sky*. Put differently, although scholarly attention has been paid to explorations on gender relations in the field of sports in China, not many sources are available for examining the details on how gender discrimination is perpetuated in the discourses surrounding sports reporting.

To fill the gap in the existing scholarship, I will probe into the problem of gender inequality in athletics in Chinese society by deploying a feminist CDA perspective and a feminist rhetorical criticism perspective. The following section will focus on the exploration of studies on gender relations in CDA.

#### *Review of Studies on Gender Relations in Critical Discourse Analysis*

The review of studies on gender relations in CDA used key words such as "Critical Discourse Analysis of gender relations", "Critical Discourse Analysis of gender discrimination", "studies on gender relations from the perspective of Critical Discourse



Analysis”, or “studies on gender discrimination from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis”, and similar ways of expressing that will help to generate the largest scope of existing literature. Due to the fact that CDA and the media are the two principal contexts in which gender inequality is being explored in this research, the review of the literature in both the global and the Chinese contexts will focus on how studies of the representation of women in CDA and in media discourse were conducted.

### **Studies Worldwide**

Scholars of CDA have considered diverse discourses in the exploration of gender inequality (see Holmes, 2005; Wodak, 2005). However, existing CDA studies on gender relations in international community focus largely on Western context such as America or Spain and fewer are on Asian culture. Moreover, there has not been much attention paid to gender inequality in the context of sports.

In North and Latin America, CDA studies on gender inequality are largely conducted in the U.S and Brazil. However, in none of the cases has any study focused on exploring representations of women in sports. In the U.S., studies of the problem of gender discrimination focus on texts produced in school and campaign discourses. To use educational discourse as an example, Kathryn A. Remlinger found that “although sexism manifests itself in different ways on [the campus of an engineering school and that of a liberal arts and professional university], a similar androcentric, heterosexist ideology is pervasive on each campus” (Lazar 117-118). Remlinger has also found that “whereas women tend to be

represented in terms of their sexuality and appearance, men tend to be described with regard to their behaviour, intellect and attitude” and these notions are “constantly negotiated, among students as well as within individuals’ own thinking” (Lazar 120).

In comparison, in the discourse of campaign, Talbot found that although the NRA’s (National Rifle Association) campaign slogans appeal to women to wield weapons to avoid becoming victims of violence, “the personal empowerment given by firearms ... presents a personalized and commodified notion of power: a ‘power feminism’ that offers empowerment through gun ownership” (Lazar 177). In other words, although the appeal to women is to carry firearms to help reduce the chances of being victims of violence, the appeal is, on the other hand, a recognition of male power and a reinforcement of female vulnerability in becoming targets of violence. Consequently, the campaign slogan in the U.S. shares a common ideology with the Iron Girls movement in Maoist-era China as described in the previous chapter, both of which seem to be empowering women with agency in supporting themselves, however, in fact a further upholding of a male standard in voicing gender equality. Therefore, CDA studies on the representations of women in the U.S. reveal that discourses which ostensibly seek to empower women actually perpetuate inequality by simply recasting male agency in different forms.

In Brazil, CDA studies of the problem of gender discrimination focus on texts that are produced in different genres. Magalhães found, by examining how voice and interdiscursivity in three different genres<sup>6</sup> construct gender identity of women from three generations, that the

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<sup>6</sup> i.e. newsletter texts in a community adult literacy programme, a discussion of advertisements in class in the programme, and interviews with women learners in another adult literacy programme.

texts “[indicate] a co-existence of old and new identities among women across three generation groups” (“Interdiscursivity” 181). Accordingly, women in Brazil are required to adapt to the discursive realities of male domains while continuing to function in their own sphere, making them subject to a double standard which males do not face.

In another study, Magalhães explored how presupposition and common-sense assumptions in three genres (namely, comic strips, a book, and a woman’s proposal for the Brazilian Constitution of 1988) express a strong discriminatory gender ideology. According to Magalhães, “heterogeneity guides presuppositions and common-sense assumptions of texts *about* women and texts *produced* by women in Brazil”, which reveals the “coexistence of the discourse of control and the discourse of liberation” (“A Critical Discourse Analysis” 183; emphasis added). Consequently, gender hierarchy in Brazil is being perpetuated not only by society but also by women themselves, which is in conformity with the findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

In Europe, studies on gender inequality from a CDA perspective can be found in Velasco-Sacristán and Fuertes-Olivera’s research on the perpetuation of gender inequality in Advertising English in Spain. According to Velasco-Sacristán and Fuertes-Olivera’s, “advertising gender metaphors as indirect cognitive-pragmatic devices used in Advertising English ... give[s] rise to often covertly sexist communicated interpretations” (1982). In addition, they argue that a critical cognitive-pragmatic approach to advertising gender metaphors<sup>7</sup> is significant for the audience to identify the unspoken non-neutral gender

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<sup>7</sup>. Gender metaphors can also be found in the news depictions of male and female athletes in the context of this research. See the analyses in Chapter 5.

assumption and thus to act upon the “negative social consequences of its use in Advertising English” (Velasco-Sacristán and Fuertes-Olivera 1982).

In Africa, research that shares similarities with mine concerning how the use of linguistic features in public expressions convey a discrimination against women is conducted by Ndambuki and Janks’s in Kenya. Based on the exploration of the use of pronouns and modality in different contexts, Ndambuki and Janks found that “[w]omen are represented against a backdrop of discourses of patriarchy, rurality and poverty that construct them as poor, ignorant and illiterate; constructions which seem to perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women in society” (92). Similarly, in the context of this study, the newspapers have devoted space to representations of female athletes; however, an examination of the news representations of female athletes reveals that their performance is being excluded from public’s recognition (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

The review of existing CDA studies on the depictions of women in the international community shows that most of the studies concentrate in non-Asian contexts and apply theories largely from linguistic theories from Semantics, Pragmatics, or Cognitive Linguistics and Burke’s rhetorical theories have not gained significant attention from scholars. Therefore, this study will demonstrate how Fairclough’s CDA (see Chapter 2) and Burke’s rhetorical theories can work together to help to expose gender inequality that news discourse perpetuates in China. The interdisciplinary approach to the exploration of gender inequality will also show how CDA and rhetorical studies will establish another angle from which feminist CDA scholars can explore the issue of gender inequality.

Studies on the representations of women in media discourse can be found both in those that use “media” as an inclusive term and in those that explore specific forms of media represented by advertising and print journalism (which I define as the conventional newspapers and magazines, both in their print and online versions).

A significant study on the representations of women that uses “media” as an inclusive category is Barát’s research on the limited space given to the depiction of women in Hungary’s print media. According to Barát, it is assumed that along with the changes in Hungary’s political system, there would have been “some space in the printed media for feminist voices articulating what social and cultural changes they consider relevant in the post-state socialist era, including the contestation over the meaning of the term ‘feminism’ itself” (Lazar 205). Nevertheless, Barát found that there was still a gate-keeping strategy that excludes women’s voices in the printed media, which is a perpetuation of the asymmetrical gender power relationship in the democratization of Hungary. While the social context of Barát’s study differs from that of this research, the findings between the two share similarities. As will be shown in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, although female athletes are given space in the news coverage, the representations reveal immediately a gate-keeping strategy which prevents them from obtaining equal recognition for their athletic competence and remarkable achievements. Therefore, Barát’s research provides references for my research.

As classified earlier, in addition to using “media” as an inclusive term in exploring the representations of women, scholars have also shown interests in how advertising and print

journalism portray women. Therefore, the following two sections will elaborate on the relevant studies that have been conducted in the two forms of media.

### *Advertising*

Lazar (2005) studies representations of women in advertising from the Singapore market. In Singapore, there is a trend for men to marry women who have relatively little education due to the belief that these women are less demanding and more submissive. To encourage Singaporean men to relax their attitude towards highly educated women in order to maintain the nation's valued gene pool, the Singaporean government launched the 'Family Life' advertising campaign to alter men's traditional Confucian-Asian mindset (Lazar 139-140).

However, although the Singaporean government "recognizes that men's attitude needs to change" so as to "overcome the impediment towards marriages and having children, the masculinist government – still largely the preserve of conservative men – has been reluctant to initiate radical changes that would seriously alter the prevailing gender order" (Lazar 142). As Lazar argues, the campaign is a representation of the continuing influence of the traditional Confucian-Asian values which "support men's position as heads of households, and prioritize for women their 'natural' reproductive and nurturing roles as mothers" (143). Therefore, even the effort to change the unequal gender power relation still manages to perpetuate it, by framing change in the language of what resists the change. As will be shown later in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, although representations of female athletes ostensibly

compliment them on their achievements, the consistent deployment of Confucian-influenced language which subordinates their athletic achievement to the performance of traditional virtues in ways represents a consistent rhetorical containment strategy which does not appear in the coverage of male athletes. This kind of compromised affirmation of female agency is in alignment with Lazar's finding in her study of the Singaporean context. In addition to research on media representations of women in advertising, scholars have also explored how women are depicted in print journalism. Consequently, I will offer a lens of relevant studies that have focused on representations of women in print journalism.

### *Print journalism*

Studies on media representations of women in print journalism around the globe concentrate in European countries on the examination of newspapers. Based on a corpus analysis of the press data in Germany and Britain, Jaworska and Krishnamurthy found that “the analysis of the search term *feminism/Feminismus* in the British and German press corpora revealed that there is a strong tendency to portray the movement in negative terms” (423). In addition, “there is also a noticeable ‘willingness’ on the part of the press to report the demise of feminism, or to treat it with a degree of irony (trivialization)” (Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 424). In other words, the patriarchal gender order has been a highly normalized assumption which governs news reportage on gender relations in Germany and Britain. As the analyses will show in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, although there is not an overt expression of the unwelcoming attitude towards female athletes’ remarkable

accomplishments, the portrayal of them in the news media reveals a discernible downplaying and containment of the perception of females as capable of surpassing boundaries, which by nature is a trivialization of female agency even at the most elite levels of achievement.

A different context for examining the phenomenon of gender inequality is found in Portugal in the context of gay rights in Gouveia's exploration of "a particular set of texts that was released over a week, under the general title 'Gay Power' ('Poder Gay') in the "most important quality daily *Diário de Notícias*" (Lazar 229;). Gouveia found that although "there is an explicit refusal to discriminate negatively against gays and lesbians, ... there is also the construction of a sense of fear associated with homosexuality" (Lazar 247). However, "the homophobia is male-directed" (Lazar 247), which means that given that the homophobia is directed towards gays, lesbians are doubly discriminated against due to not only the homophobia but also to their female gender identity. Consequently, although Gouveia's study explores a special type of gender relations – one that is between members of the same sex, it is found that when homosexual identity is framed in negative terms and as fear, the fear is directed against gay men, thus empowering them albeit in negative terms; whereas lesbians are doubly marginalized by not being seen as worthy of even this kind of negative recognition.

To conclude, the literature review of existing studies on gender relations in CDA around the globe demonstrates that, firstly, Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories are rarely concerned in the exploration of gender relations; secondly, studies that focus on news representations of sports women in CDA studies are still relatively few in number; and



thirdly, existing CDA studies on gender relations concentrate largely in European and American countries and fewer are in Asian contexts. Therefore, this project explores how gender relations in the largest Asian country – China, are being depicted in its news discourse and how its social and cultural conditions have shaped the portrayal of gender relations in media. The following section will examine how gender relations were explored in CDA and in media discourse in China.

### **Studies in China**

A review of critical discourse studies on gender relations in Chinese academic field shows that Chinese linguists deploy theories from a variety of linguistic branches. These include Lexics (Pan, 2001; Zhang *et al.*, 2002; Tian, 2010; Chen, 2012), Pragmatics (Feng, 2003; Quan, 2004; Shi and Zhang, 2004; Chen *et al.*, 2005; Mo and Jiang, 2006), Cognitive Linguistics (Xiao and Xiao, 2003), Sociolinguistics (Wu, 2001; Yao, 2003; Wang, 2005; Shi, 2007; Zhang, 2009), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Zhou, 2009), and CDA (see Dai, 2008; Liao, 2008; Wang, 2009; Qin, 2009). However, rhetorical theories have not gained enough attention from linguists in the exploration of gender inequality.

The fewer existing CDA studies on gender relations draw upon largely materials that are in English language (see Dai, 2008; Liao, 2008; Qin, 2009), and fewer focus on the examination of the use of Mandarin (see Wang, 2009). Mandarin is the national language spoken in Chinese society; therefore, examining how the use of the national language in news discourse constructs gender relations allows us to identify the ideological power of the use of

Mandarin in shaping people's perception of gender relations. Moreover, in spite of the fact that Mandarin-language materials have been considered in some scholars' research, the materials are always accompanied by a simultaneous analysis of English-language materials that are produced in the English-speaking world which may not truly reflect Chinese ways of thinking regarding gender relationships (see Pan, 2001; Xiao and Xiao, 2003; Feng, 2003; He, 2003; Quan, 2004; Mo and Jiang, 2006; Shi, 2007; Fan and Zheng, 2007; Chen, 2012). Therefore, there will be potential differences regarding the choices of language in the materials.

Owing to the fact that many of the English news materials produced in China employ different word choices from those produced in native English-speaking countries, an exploration of how the English news texts produced in China represent gender relations will reveal how widely the discriminatory gender attitude is being perpetuated across different sources of news texts (for a further elaboration upon the reasons regarding the selection of the news materials, see Chapter 4).

As classified earlier, studies on the representations of women by drawing upon media discourse include both those that use "media" as an inclusive term and those that have a clear focus on the forms of media being studied. In the latter case, research can be found in media forms such as advertising and print journalism (which further includes the conventional newspapers and magazines in both their print and online versions).

Studies on media representations of women by using "media" as an inclusive term can be found in Li's (2007) research. According to Li, media representations of women in China

neither objectively depict women nor reflect social reality, which is a result of the interactions among the unequal distribution of the coverage of men and women in the reportage, the structure and system of media, social value, as well as social reality. This perspective is in line with what Fu (Bu 4) has found regarding the disproportional distribution of the news content devoted to the coverage of men and women in mainstream Chinese newspapers (see Chapter 1).

In addition to the studies that use “media” as an inclusive term in exploring the representation of gender relations, scholars have also shown interests in examining how women are depicted in specific forms of media. Therefore, the following two sections will draw upon advertising and print journalism (which includes conventional newspapers and magazines in their print and online versions) contexts to present how women have been represented.

### *Advertising*

Research on gender discrimination perpetuated in advertising discourse in China is found in TV advertisements. Based on the analysis of women’s images in 1197 T.V. advertisements broadcasted in TV stations in 10 cities in China, Liu and Bu found that one-third of the advertisements shows gender discrimination against women, manifested through the perpetuation of gender stereotype and using women as objects that attract customers’ attention for consumption (45). For the former case, representations of women can be classified into two categories: one portrays women as caring mothers and virtuous wives, the

other depicts women as those who are keen on consumption and entertainment (Liu and Bu 45); for the latter case, women appear primarily in advertisements on clothing and hairdressing, household articles, food and beverage (Liu and Bu 49).

The other similar finding can be found in Ma's research. By studying major Chinese TV advertisements, Ma (2005) found that women are often associated with traditional stereotypical feminine gender roles such as mothers and care-givers (also see Ji, 2008; Lu, 2010; Pang, 2010; Zhang, 2012). Thus, Ma argues that in advertisement creation, media should depict women as independent beings who are capable of self-image-shaping, rather than depicting women according to a male value.

Different from the negative representations of women in TV advertisements in China, Zha (2010) found, through both case and corpus analyses of the contents of TV advertisements that portray women, that TV advertising shows a tendency of breaking with conservatism in reporting on gender relations and is paying more and more attention to audiences' response. However, as the analyses of the news representations of male and female Chinese athletes will show later in this research (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), although the news media ostensibly provide space for the portrayal of female athletes, the ideology underlying both the verbal and the non-verbal language remains discriminatory. Therefore, while media representations on gender relations have shown some openness in China, more efforts still need to be made to facilitate the achievement of gender equality in media depictions of gender relations (for a discussion of the specific approaches, see Chapter

8). The other form of media that scholars have taken into consideration in this context is print journalism. Consequently, I will now review studies that draw upon print journalism.

### *Print journalism*

As classified earlier, print journalism includes both conventional newspapers and magazines in their print and online versions. Studies on the representations of women in newspaper discourse show that the coverage of women in major Chinese newspapers was significantly less extensive than that of men and that the number of female reporters is smaller than that of males (see Female Journalists Association in the Capital, 1995; Lu, 2005). In addition, although major Chinese newspapers devoted to women's issues<sup>8</sup> and major Chinese internet news such as *Sina.com* provide coverage of Chinese women of different backgrounds, the representations of women are symbolically associated with their sexual appeals (see Yu, 2010), which shows the dominance of male values in the depiction of women. Similar evidence can also be found in two of the mainstream Chinese newspapers such as the prominent coverage of pole-dancing in *Xinhuanet*<sup>9</sup> and *People's Daily*.<sup>10</sup>

In so far as the representations of women in magazine discourse is concerned, scholars found that women are constantly portrayed as caring mothers and virtuous wives whose physical attractiveness is exploited to promote the popularity of commodities (see Liu

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<sup>8</sup>. For example, *China Women's News* (Zhongguo Funu Bao) is one of the major newspapers in China that focuses on women's issues.

<sup>9</sup>. See the news coverage at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-07/18/c\\_132553647.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-07/18/c_132553647.htm).

<sup>10</sup>. See the news coverage at <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/0128/c90782-8842206.html>.

and Qi, 2006; Zhao, 2006; Zhao, 2009). These stereotypical representations of women in magazine discourse are reflections of the perpetuation of traditional women's gender roles as defined in Confucianism (for an elaboration upon Confucian gender conventions in Chinese society, see Chapter 7).

In conclusion, the review of CDA studies and studies of media representations of gender relations both worldwide and in China reveals that existing studies demonstrate a variety of characteristics. Firstly, there is an application of linguistic theories primarily from traditional linguistic branches such as Semantics and Pragmatics, and fewer research have deployed a CDA perspective and/or a rhetorical perspective. Secondly, the studies concentrate largely in American and European countries and fewer were in Asian context. Thirdly, Mandarin-language material has largely been ignored in the analysis. Therefore, using Fairclough's perspective of CDA and Burke's rhetorical theories, I will examine how gender inequality is being perpetuated in news discourse in China. The integration of theories and principles from both fields in the analyses of news texts will not only enrich the scope of existing feminist studies, but will also provide the international community a view of the widely existing gender inequality in Chinese society.

Rhetorical criticism is the other perspective from which this study is going to examine the news coverage. By deploying a parallel structure to the literature review of studies on gender relations in CDA, I will survey how the topic on gender inequality has been given concern in rhetorical criticism.

### *Review of Studies on Gender Relations in Rhetorical Criticism*

The literature reviewed in this section were identified by using key words such as “rhetorical studies on gender relations”, “rhetorical studies on gender discrimination”, “studies on gender relations from the perspective of rhetorical criticism”, “studies on gender discrimination from the perspective of rhetorical criticism”, or “rhetorical representations of women”, with relevant variations. To provide a macro view of studies on gender relations in rhetorical criticism, I will first survey relevant research that has been conducted around the world and then focus particularly on studies in China.

#### **Studies Worldwide**

Research on studies of gender relations in rhetorical criticism in the international community can be classified into different themes. Specifically, some studies focused on the exploration of the history of feminist movements (see Campbell, 1973; 1989; Flannery, 2001; Renegar and Sowards, 2003). Some argued for women’s equal participation in political leadership (see Allen and Faigley, 1995). Some criticized the constraints imposed on women’s speech freedom by the patriarchal gender assumptions (see Browne, 1992; Lowry, 2003). Moreover, there are also studies that examined the portrayal of women in traditional scholarly rhetorical works (see Swearingen, 1992) and the sexist portrayal of women in advertising (see D’Angelo, 1986; Lingard, 1993; Chaudhuri, 2001; Hope, 2004).

While women as an inclusive category have been given consideration in rhetorical studies, there has been a growing body of feminist works in rhetorical criticism. In addition to

studies dedicated to feminist rhetorical criticism itself and its female practitioners (see “Gender and Writing”, 1990; Patterson and Corning, 1997; Ryan, 2006), there have been works published in a number of specialized contexts, including but not limited to themes such as ethnicity (see West, 1996; Wu, 2002; Eves, 2005; McClish, 2005; Hesford and Schell, 2008; Royster, 2012) and workplace experience, including recent rhetorical studies of women in traditionally male professions (see Skinner, 2014; George *et al.*, 2014).

A body of literature studying women’s public discourse as rhetorical theory and criticism also exists. Representative titles include *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* by Andrea A. Lunsford (1995), *Listening to Their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women* by Molly Meijer Wertheimer (1997), *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays and Controversies* by Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen J. Ryan (2010), and *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies* by Eileen E. Schell and K. J. Rawson (2010).

To conclude, studies on gender relations in rhetorical field show that while a variety of discourses have been given consideration, there is a need for further research into the portrayal of gender relations in news discourse. This study fills a gap by using rhetorical criticism to examine how gender relations are portrayed in news discourse. Based on a review of rhetorical studies on gender relations in the global context, I will examine how gender relations have been probed in rhetorical studies in Chinese context for the purpose of revealing the shared characteristics and the distinctions regarding the research in the two contexts.



## Studies in China

Research on gender relations conducted in rhetorical criticism in China is comparatively much fewer than that in other parts of the world. An examination of existing studies shows that there are rarely any studies that have explored gender relations in rhetorical criticism in China (see Xie, 2011; Jin, 2013; Luo, 2014; Wu, 2014). Among the existing studies, some explored the characteristics and the social and cultural roots of the emergence of feminist rhetorical studies in China (see Xie, 2011). Some are on the review of Xie's (2011) research (see Wu, 2014). The other one argued for the research value of feminist rhetorical criticism through an analysis of and an elaboration upon the style and motivation of using feminist rhetoric in ancient Chinese poems (see Jin, 2013). Moreover, there are also examinations of the use of feminist rhetoric in women artists' works (on paintings) during the Republic of China. This type of research is represented by Luo's (2014) research in which the author summarized the roots, the prominent characteristics, and the expressive means of feminist rhetoric in those works as well as the theoretical implications for modern feminist artistic creation in China.

A scholar worth mentioning in this context is Xing Lu. While she is one of the few rhetorical scholars whose work approaches subject matters on China, including traditional Chinese rhetoric, in light of the Western rhetorical tradition from Aristotle to Burke and Bitzer, her work only touches in passing on feminist issues in rhetoric, such as her exploration of feminist issues during Chinese Cultural Revolution. A representative work of Lu is her work *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought*,

*Culture, and Communication*, in which she argues that during the Cultural Revolution, “[f]emininity was considered bourgeois” (63), and was a “counterrevolutionary trait” (243).

The scarcity of studies in rhetorical criticism using a feminist perspective in China shows that rhetorical criticism has not been fully considered in the Chinese academic world. The existing studies either focus on the theoretical exploration of feminist rhetorical criticism (see Xie, 2011; Wu, 2014) or apply feminist rhetorical theories to the examination of art (see Luo, 2014) or literary discourse (see Jin, 2013), and studies that drew upon newspaper discourse remain relatively few in number. Furthermore, among the two studies that apply feminist rhetorical theories to the examination of discourse (see Jin, 2013; Luo, 2014), additional studies are needed on the examination of modern Mandarin-language materials. Last but not least, there have not been many studies that explored visual representations of women in Chinese athletic context from the perspective of rhetorical criticism (see Luo, 2014). To fill the gap, this study uses rhetorical criticism to explore how news discourse in modern China depicts gender relations on an ideological basis.

### *Conclusion*

The literature review of studies in both CDA and rhetorical criticism in international and Chinese contexts reveals that studies on gender inequality in the workplace, the labour market, and advertising campaign are widely concerned. However, gender relations in the area of sports have not been given full consideration. Moreover, existing studies draw upon materials from advertising, magazines, and literary discourse and fewer are based on news

texts. Furthermore, among the fewer studies that explored gender inequality as perpetuated in news media, there has not been any study that integrated CDA and rhetorical criticism. Last but not least, there is a lack of research that examines how the use of the Mandarin-language material perpetuates an ideology of gender inequality. Therefore, this study aims to raise a critical awareness of feminists regarding the significance of research on gender inequality in the context of sports.

With a theoretical framework and relevant literature review being given in the last two chapters, the following chapter will sketch out the research methodology that this study employs in analysing the news discourse.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is a delineation of the research methodology that this study will draw upon in analyzing the news discourse. Specifically, it will first provide a description of the research material that this research focuses on. Then it will introduce the procedures of coding the material. Finally, this chapter will outline Norman Fairclough's method of conducting CDA and Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis.

#### *Research Material*

As the literature review in Chapter 3 has shown, there is a need to extend the scope of research into the exploration of gender inequality in the field of sports in China. To address this need, I will analyse news coverage from *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet* published throughout the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games (held in London July 27, 2012 to August 12, 2012, London Time, GMT, Britain; and July 27, 2012 to August 13, 2012, Beijing Time, China). The news material includes both the textual and the visual portrayal of representative male and female Chinese athletes. As each of the three newspapers has certain distinct features, I will provide an introduction to the background of the three newspapers.

### Three Representative Newspapers

Among the three newspapers, two newspapers are in Mandarin and one is in English. Relevant publications include the electronic Mandarin-language version of the sports-focused newspaper *China Sports Daily*, the electronic Mandarin-language version of *Heilongjiang Daily* from Heilongjiang Province, as well as the electronic English-language version of the newspaper *Xinhua News – Xinhuanet*.

Established in 1958, *China Sports Daily* “is a specialized newspaper on sports and it is run by China’s Physical Education and Sport Committee”.<sup>11</sup> It disseminates the central government’s principles, policies, and laws on sports and reports on domestic and international sports news as well as introducing sports theories and techniques to enthusiasts so as to popularize athletic activities across the country and thus to improve people’s physical condition and activate people’s national spirit.<sup>12</sup>

The section topics<sup>13</sup> included in the online version of *China Sports Daily* during the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games change depending on the quantity of news to be published each day. Basically, there are four to twelve section topics in *China Sports Daily*, including *Competition News*, *Comprehensive News*, *National Fitness*, *Football Observation*, *Boutique Preview*, *School Physical Education*, *Sports Lottery World*, *Competition • News*,

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<sup>11</sup>. See more information on *China Sports Daily* at [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content\\_23484.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content_23484.htm).

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>. See Volumes 11242 to 11259 in *China Sports Daily* for the samples selected for analysis in this dissertation.

*Olympics · Arena*, *Olympics · Synthesis*, *Olympics · Special Topics*, and *Olympics · Voice*. In this research, I will select relevant textual and visual reportage of male and female athletes from the last five sections above (i.e. *Competition · News*; *Olympics · Arena*; *Olympics · Synthesis*; *Olympics · Special Topics*; and *Olympics · Voice*) as they appeared in the summer of 2012.

*Heilongjiang Daily*<sup>14</sup> is a newspaper that was established in 1945. It is published in the most northeastern province of China – Heilongjiang Province. It is a provincial party committee official newspaper sanctioned by National Press and Publication Administration.<sup>15</sup>

The section topics<sup>16</sup> of the online version of *Heilongjiang Daily* during the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games vary from four to twelve types depending on the scope of the topics included in each edition. Specifically, the newspaper includes sections of *Important News*, *Special Issues*, *Current News*, *Focus on Current Affairs*, *Olympic Games*, *Harbin News*, *Today's Click*, *Public Announcements*, *Comprehensive Reports*, *Tourism*, *World*, *Photography and Drawing*, and *Special Issues on Theories*. As there is only one section (i.e. *Olympic Games*) that focuses particularly on the reportage of the Olympic events, therefore, I will draw upon the textual and visual portrayal of male and female athletes from this section.

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<sup>14</sup>. See more information on *Heilongjiang Daily* at <http://zt.hljnews.cn/ck/index.shtml>; and <http://www.hljnews.cn/zygl/gywm.html>; and <http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=9q-5lvDWTNtRjN2d7CmPHohw2JmUZ6f-wzJo8GHn4SIbceJg9VeQA3d85RkQaN74Wvz6LKwl3K6fu4cUPMdNP>.

<sup>15</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>. See the basic format of *Heilongjiang Daily* at [http://epaper.hljnews.cn/epaper/web/hljrb/html/2012-07/28/node\\_3.htm](http://epaper.hljnews.cn/epaper/web/hljrb/html/2012-07/28/node_3.htm).

As an online news provider of the *Xinhua News Agency*, *Xinhuanet* is a central governmental newspaper and it was founded in 1997 and was officially named *Xinhuanet* on March 10, 2000.<sup>17</sup> It aims to provide “around-the-clock news release with leading online public opinion at home and setting a good image of China abroad as its main task”.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, “[s]ponsored by the *Xinhua News Agency*, *Xinhuanet* is an important central news service-oriented website, and an important information organ of the central government, as well as an important platform for building up China’s online international communication capacity”.<sup>19</sup> In addition, *Xinhuanet* “pursues timely, accurate, credible and fair news coverage”<sup>20</sup> and it is “most often the first to report China’s major breaking news events, laws and regulations, appointments and removals of high-ranking officials”.<sup>21</sup> Overall, *Xinhuanet* has been able to reach immediately a wide-scale of audience both at home and abroad, releasing news items through “texts, photos, graphics, audio messages, video, blogs, podcast, microblog, short messages, and cell phone news”<sup>22</sup> in “eight languages, namely,

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<sup>17</sup>. See more information on *Xinhuanet* at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/special/2011-11/28/c\\_131274495.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/special/2011-11/28/c_131274495.htm).

<sup>18</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>. Ibid.

Chinese (simplified and traditional), English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Japanese and Tibetan”.<sup>23</sup>

The section topics *Xinhuanet* covers during the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games include four major categories.<sup>24</sup> They are: *Global Edition*, which includes China, World, Business, Culture & Education, Sports, Entertainment, Sci & Tech, Health, Travel, In-Depth, and Odd News; *Services*, which includes Markets, Weather, World Clock, Maps, Lifestyle, Art, Movie, Music, Fashion, and Theater; *Live in China*, which includes Travel, Business, Education, Jobs, Immigration, Marriage, Adoption, Residence, Study Zone, Books, Useful Info, and Food; and *Database*, which includes About China and Topics. In the present context, I will select news samples from the section of Sports in *Global Edition* featuring both textual and visual representations of male and female Chinese athletes during the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Due to the differences in the topics each newspaper reports on, the number of relevant news samples selected from the three newspapers will automatically vary. Accordingly, the number of examples included in the thematic descriptions of male and female athletes in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 will vary as well. When there are a number of examples either in the same newspaper or in the three newspapers in total that reveal repeatedly the same pattern of gender ideology, I will not analyse all the examples in quantitative terms as an examination of the semantic patterns established in the representative ones will be adequate to identify the

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<sup>23</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>. See the content categories of *Xinhuanet* at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>.



gender ideologies that the news media perpetuate. However, when there are only a handful of examples existing in one or all the three newspapers in total, I will examine all the examples so as to show how intensely the discriminatory gender ideology is being conveyed.

### **Reasons for Selecting the Three Representative Newspapers**

Each of the three newspapers play a prominent role as national and regional newspapers with different niche audiences. *China Sports Daily* is the most authoritative sports-based newspaper in China run by China's Physical Education and Sport Committee. Therefore, it will be the primary newspaper that those who love sports tend to read, which will to a significant extent influence a wide cross-section of sports enthusiasts regarding their perceptions of male and female athletes' sports capacities and performance. Moreover, it is a national sport-based newspaper, which will represent mainstream attitudes towards gender relations in sports areas. Consequently, examining how gender relationships are being portrayed in this newspaper will allow us to identify how a discriminatory gender attitude is sanctioned in the state sports newspaper, thus providing a point of reference for the examination of gender relationships represented in other sources of news media in China.

*Heilongjiang Daily* is a provincial governmental newspaper circulated in the most northeastern province in China. This newspaper is representative of an established regional newspaper in China and an examination of typical representations of normative gender roles in this newspaper will illustrate the degree of uniformity between the national and regional conventions.

As an online news provider of *Xinhua News Agency*, *Xinhuanet* is the most important source of news in China sponsored by the Chinese central government and it has versions that are in different languages. While *China Sports Daily* and *Heilongjiang Daily* respectively address a national and local audience, the English-language-version of *Xinhuanet* speaks to all speakers of English in the world. By exploring the representations of male and female athletes in the English-version news texts of *Xinhuanet*, we are able to examine what the state is comfortable with in representing gender relations and how it will shape international audiences' perception of gender relations in China. Moreover, many articles published on *Xinhuanet* are sanctioned translations of Mandarin-language texts, and therefore any ideology they carry over into an English medium would be representative of what the Mandarin-speaking news practitioners consider normal. Consequently, its reportage on gender relations will be representative of Mandarin-language domestic newspapers.

To conclude, as Markula argues, it is “pertinent to analyse how newspaper coverage depicts Olympic athletes in their local, national context, but also [to] provide comparison points regarding the commonalities between the news media in different [languages]” (2). Specifically, a consideration of the news texts published in different regions will “provide a ‘global’ reading of the differences and similarities between ... [the] coverage of the Olympics and their representation of women athletes” (Markula 2). By employing materials that are targeted at different audiences and using the conventions of different languages, I will explore how the three newspapers represent consistent reiterations of common markers of an ideology in which women are disadvantaged in achieving recognition for their legitimate

accomplishments, by processes of semantic dissociation. The aspects of analyses include not only the textual features, but also the visual elements in images that portray male and female athletes. In order to present the analyses clearly, this study has designed its own method of coding the material. Therefore, I will describe how the research material is being coded.

### *Coding of Material*

The materials that this study analyses includes both those in English and those in Chinese. In consideration of non-Chinese speakers' understanding of the meanings of the news texts, I will translate all the texts into their equivalent English versions immediately after the quotation of the original samples and put them into parentheses below the original versions. However, due to the fact that translation equivalency does not exist between two entirely different languages, I can only choose the English words that are closest to the meanings of the Chinese. Moreover, the language of the reportage, being intended for general audiences who do not expect it to be overtly or consciously "artistic" or metaphorical, may be served well through translations that deliver the closest idiomatic English equivalent. Differences between Mandarin and English language journalistic style will not be a focus.

In the analysis of the Chinese news texts, although I am analysing the ideological implications of the Chinese words, I will use the equivalent English translations as tools and put the Chinese versions and their standard Chinese pinyin (alphabetical spelling) reading in parentheses after the translations so that non-Chinese speakers do not have to skip the original Chinese version each time to seek the corresponding English translation. However,

instead of providing the standard Chinese pinyin reading for each of the examples I selected from the three newspapers, I will only spell out the pinyin reading for the textual features that I focus on in the analyses in parentheses after the original Chinese words. Moreover, the specific textual features that are being analysed will also be underlined in both the original Chinese version and the English translation so that readers will themselves know the corresponding Chinese words that I am analysing.

In addition, the materials selected from all three newspapers are labelled consecutively as examples (ex. Example 1, Example 2), and the sources from which the examples are drawn are provided after the last example in the consecutive sequence drawn from that source. This principle will also apply to the analyses of the visual representations.

Lastly, due to the different conventions of spelling a person's name in Chinese and in English (which is that family/last name first and given/first name second in the Chinese-spelling conventions, while an opposite rule in the English-spelling conventions), the spelling of all the Chinese names in this study still follows its original order and uses the standard Chinese pinyin. However, this principle does not apply to the spelling of the names that are in Cantonese (as it has its own spelling system) and names that have been widely spelt in the English manner due to the reputation of those persons in the international community, such as some Chinese scholars who are widely known by Western academic world.

As this research applies Norman Fairclough's method of conducting CDA and Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis to the examination of the news discourse, at the end of this chapter, I will enlarge on how the two critics have elaborated on their methods of analysis.

### *Analytical Tools*

The analysis of the textual material in this research employs Norman Fairclough's (1989) CDA by focusing primarily on the textual features that reveal an opposing ideology in the depiction of male and female athletes. In comparison, the examination of the visual material deploys Kenneth Burke's (1984) cluster analysis by focusing on the hand gestures and facial expressions in images that represent the athletes.

While an extensive theoretical elaboration upon CDA and a comprehensive literature review on it have been given in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, in the following section, I will introduce how Norman Fairclough has expounded his method of conducting CDA.

#### **Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis**

According to Norman Fairclough, "CDA entails some form of detailed textual analysis. It specifically includes a combination of interdiscursive analysis of texts (i.e. of how different genres, discourses and styles are articulated together) and linguistic and other forms of semiotic analysis" ("Critical Discourse Analysis" 10). In this research, a detailed analysis of the textual features that represent the athletes will uncover the ideologies that male and female athletes are associated with.

As Fairclough further argues, "[m]ethodologically, CDA entails working in a 'transdisciplinary' way through dialogue with other disciplines and theories which are addressing contemporary processes of social change" ("Critical Discourse Analysis" 1). Accordingly, an exploration of gender inequality in news discourse in China from a single

perspective would not be adequate given the complex nature of gender inequality in Chinese society.

According to Fairclough, there are three dimensions that discourse constitutes, which he labels as *texts*, *interactions*, and *contexts* (“Language” 26; emphasis added). Firstly, “texts” refers to the linguistic products which are composed of vocabularies, grammar, and meanings; secondly, “interactions” is a process that considers how texts are produced and how they are interpreted; lastly, “contexts” are the social conditions upon which the production and interpretation of the texts are built (Fairclough, “Language” 26).

Corresponding to the three dimensions of discourse, Fairclough thus proposed three stages of conducting CDA, namely, *description*, *interpretation*, and *explanation* of the text (“Language” 26).

In *description*, a critical discourse scholar identifies and labels “the formal features (formal properties) of a text” (Fairclough, “Language” 26). *Description* identifies the dominant linguistic features a discourse employs in communicating an ideology. In the context of this research, *description* identifies the dominant textual languages the news discourse employs in perpetuating an unequal gender relation between male and female athletes. In *interpretation*, a critical discourse analyst “is concerned with the relationship between *text* and *interaction* – with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation” (Fairclough, “Language” 26; emphasis added). In this study, it is to examine how the textual features interact in shaping the ideology of gender inequality. Lastly, in *explanation*, a critical discourse scholar is concerned with

stating the relationship between *interaction* and *social context* (Fairclough, “Language” 26; emphasis added). In this dissertation, to explain why news discourse in China consistently perpetuates a discriminatory gender ideology against female athletes, we need to account for how the social and cultural gender conventions, particularly those defined in Confucian traditions in Chinese society, play a role in the news representations of female athletes. Using Fairclough’s framework of conducting CDA, I will explore how news discourse in China reinforces an ideology of gender inequality in portraying male and female athletes through an analysis of different levels of linguistic representations of the athletes.

As an approach that also has a societal dimension, rhetorical cluster analysis facilitates the identification of how the symbolic use of “language” (in an inclusive term) employed in different forms of expression (such as verbal and non-verbal) has the power of perpetuating a particular type of ideology. Therefore, I will expand on Kenneth Burke’s cluster analysis and illustrate how it will contribute to the exploration of the ideology of gender inequality in the visual representations of male and female athletes in the news discourse.

### **Kenneth Burke’s Cluster Analysis**

A rhetorical analysis of the discursive patterns identified by CDA moves beyond identifying ideologies to examine how those patterns motivate the perpetuation of ideology by inducing cooperation with an ideology in the act of communication itself. Kenneth Burke argues that “[t]here is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion,

identification ('consubstantiality') and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed')" (Burke, "A Rhetoric" 46). Therefore, Burke's rhetoric, unlike traditional rhetoric that focuses on the conscious and overt use of persuasive rhetorical strategies, is more concerned with finding evidence of motivation behind a symbolic act and examining its relationship to the strategies that make up the rhetorical act. Rhetorical criticism associated with Burke approaches language as a form of symbolic action whose ultimate purpose is to foster a sense of identification between rhetor and audiences.

To explore how a rhetor builds identification with audiences in a rhetorical artefact, according to Burke, one begins by "by noting what subjects cluster about other subjects (what images *b, c, d* the [speaker] introduces whenever he talks with engrossment of subject *a*)" ("Attitudes" 232). Alternatively, Burke's cluster analysis explores the process of how the terminologies a rhetor employs are clustered with each other and are finally subsumed in "symbolic mergers" (Burke, "Attitudes" 233). According to Burke, "symbolic mergers" are the "bridging devices" which "cannot be explained with reference to their face value alone, but are a 'way across' to many other ingredients (as when one man says 'liberty' and means the right to retain his capitalist holdings, and another by the same word means socialism)" ("A Rhetoric" 224). Put differently, "symbolic mergers" refer to the symbolic meanings that may seem to be unrelated to each other, or even in opposition to each other, but finally merge with each other in fostering a shared ideology, as individual terms are drawn into the semantic "orbit" of a text's dominant key terms, or an "entelechia/ultimate term" (Burke,



“On Symbols” 71) representing the most complete expression of the logic implicit in the cluster.

In cluster analysis, a critic needs to first identify the key terms according to the principles of frequency and/or intensity (which means that even when a term is being used only once, the meaning of the term is intense enough to represent the ideological meaning the rhetor is intending to convey) of the use of the terms (Burke, “Attitudes” 232; also see Foss, “Rhetorical Criticism” 66). Then the critic charts the clusters around the key terms that express a similar meaning (Burke, “Attitudes” 233; also see Foss, “Rhetorical Criticism” 67). Lastly, the critic provides an analysis of the clusters and interprets how the clusters interact in fostering a shared worldview (Burke, “Attitudes” 233; also see Foss, “Rhetorical Criticism” 67-68).

Moreover, a critic needs to identify an ultimate term of some kind, such as a “god” term (representing the ultimate good to which the term refers) or a “devil” term (representing the most negative extent of the term’s reference), into the “orbit” of which other terms are drawn through the process of the symbolic merger that takes on a specific meaning and function governed by the ultimate term. As Brown states, by tracing the “clusters of words and images and the listing of the elements in a work according to such generalizations as ‘what goes with what’, ‘what versus what’, and ‘from what to what’” (38), cluster analysis enables us to identify not only what is present but also what is absent (Blakesley 103). In this research, I am not principally applying Burke’s cluster analysis to the analysis of traditional verbal texts but to non-verbal images by focusing on the hand gestures and facial expressions

in images that portray the athletes as both verbal and non-verbal communication are all forms of communication acts (also see Foss, “Rhetorical” 75). Consequently, the process works the same way, which requires as well a three-step analysis (i.e. Identifying the key visual elements – Exploring the clustered visual elements around the key visual elements – Analysing and interpreting the clustered visual elements).

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Fairclough’s method of CDA and Burke’s approach to cluster analysis provide a more complete picture of not only how we can identify ideologies in texts that appear objective or neutral (using CDA), but how we can see how the disparate elements come to work together to generate acceptance on the part of audiences (using rhetorical criticism). With the research methodology being specified, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 explores the first research question regarding the gender ideologies that the textual and the visual representations of the athletes convey in the news discourse.

## CHAPTER 5

### CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTUAL MATERIAL

Based on the elaboration upon the research methodology in the previous chapter, this chapter conducts the first two steps of the CDA analysis of the textual representations of male and female athletes and leaves the last step of analysis to Chapter 7. The first research question that this study aims to answer is “What gender ideologies are encoded in the textual and the visual representations of male and female Chinese athletes in *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet*?” (see Chapter 1). Using Fairclough’s convention of conducting CDA, supplemented in individual cases with elements of Burkean cluster criticism, I will first describe the textual representations of male athletes by classifying the ideological meanings of the texts into thematic categories. Then I will deploy a parallel structure to the description of the textual representations of female athletes. Finally, I will provide an interpretation of the representations of male and female athletes in the news discourse using CDA concepts and principles.

#### *Analysis of the Textual Representations of Male Athletes*

Male athletes’ agency in claiming victory is manifested in news stories that describe the athletes’ instinctive/primal reaction to victory, the depiction of male competition as fully embodied in a vocabulary suggestive of physical violence, and the identification of male victory with supremacy and authority, as well as the degree to which a lack of emotional

restraint is acceptable for male athletes for establishing their masculine image. Under the following headings, I will analyse how the representations of male athletes in the three newspapers suggest that competition and victory are seen as peculiarly male phenomena, which men can comfortably embody in the public perception in ways, and to degrees, which women cannot.

### **Male Representations: Instinctive/Primal Reaction**

The first manifestation of the reinforcement of male athletes' agency is reflected in the portrayal of the athletes' instinctive/primal reaction during the competition on the arena. To illustrate, I will draw upon the following news texts:

#### ***Example 1:***

这一天，孙杨挥臂怒吼、兴奋落泪、畅快一笑，让我们看到了一个属于 21 岁大男孩的率性与纯真。<sup>25</sup>

(On this day, Sun Yang roars while waving arms, sheds tears with excitement, and smiles freely, which shows us the whims and innocence that belong to a 21-year-old boy.) [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

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<sup>25</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

**Example 2:**

率先触壁后，矗立在水中的孙杨紧握住双拳，拍打着水面，发出咆哮，这是男人的狂吼！是赢得翻身仗的怒吼！<sup>26</sup>

(After being the first to touch the wall, Sun Yang was standing in the water with fists clenched, slapping the water and growling: this is a man's howling! A roaring for winning the war!) [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

**Example 3:**

吴景彪试举前的一叫，吓了记者席上的外国记者一跳。<sup>27</sup>

(Wu Jingbiao yelled once before the attempt, startling foreign correspondents who are in the press gallery). [referring to the weightlifter Wu Jingbiao]

**Example 4:**

雷声扔掉头盔，仰天长啸。<sup>28</sup>

(Lei Sheng threw away the helmet and shouted into the air). [referring to the fencer Lei Sheng]

*(China Sports Daily)*

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<sup>26</sup>. See this quote in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>27</sup>. See this quote in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 31, 2012.

<sup>28</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

**Example 5:**

He punched the water in delight and let out an extended bellow.<sup>29</sup> [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

(Xinhuanet)

The portrayal of the athletes' instinctive/primal reaction is achieved through textual features that represent animals' sounds. To illustrate, the newspapers use the verbs *roar* (怒吼; nuhou), *growl* (咆哮; paoxiao) (in Example 1), and *howl* (狂吼; kuanghou) (in Example 2), and *yell* (一叫; yijiao) (in Example 3), and the noun *bellow* (in Example 5), as well as the phrase *shouted into the air* (仰天长啸; yangtianchangxiao) (in Example 4), which are sounds that by nature imitate beasts' roaring and fierceness. Moreover, the vocabularies associated with non-human animals not only links aggression and victory, but also, in emphasizing a primal, animalistic dimension of the athletes' behaviour, suggests that victory is innate or essential to male behaviour/spheres of action; there is a "natural" identification between males and victory.

### **Male Representations: Physical Violence**

The second manifestation of the reinforcement of male athletes' agency reveals an intensification from their primal, animalistic behavior. The act of competition, and victory in competition, achieves a kind of embodiment through being portrayed in language which

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<sup>29</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/05/c\\_123529677.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/05/c_123529677.htm) in Xinhuanet published on August 5, 2012.

associates it with physical violence. Specifically, the athletes' physical violence is evoked in the depictions of their physical strength and power. To demonstrate, I will analyse the following examples:

***Example 1:***

夺冠后的孙杨一跃坐在了泳绳上，他张开双臂向全世界展示自己的力量，用手势向世界宣告自己是王者，挥拳砸水发泄自己长久压抑的情绪。<sup>30</sup>

(After winning, Sun Yang sat on the swimming ropes with a leap, and opened his arms to show the world his strength, and announced to the world with a gesture that he is a king, as well as smashing the water with his fists to vent his long-repressed emotions). [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

***Example 2:***

率先触壁后，矗立在水中的孙杨紧握住双拳，拍打着水面，发出咆哮，这是男人的狂吼！是赢得翻身仗的怒吼！<sup>31</sup>

(After being the first to touch the wall, Sun Yang was standing in the water with fists clenched, slapping the water and growl, this is a man's howling! A roaring for winning the war!) [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

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<sup>30</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>31</sup>. See Note 26.

**Example 3:**

下场时，就连邹凯自己都使劲挥了挥拳。<sup>32</sup>

(When walking out of the stage, even Zou Kai himself vigorously waved his fist)

[referring to the gymnast Zou Kai]

(*China Sports Daily*)

**Example 4:**

最后 50 米，孙杨的冲刺强劲而有力，他逐渐把朴泰桓甩开一个身位，最终孙杨以 3 分 40 秒 14 率先撞线...<sup>33</sup>

(In the last 50 meters, Sun Yang's sprint was strong and powerful. He gradually made Pu Taihuang lag behind for one swimmer's space and finally hit the finishing line in 3 minutes 40 seconds and 14 milliseconds). [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

**Example 5:**

当孙杨到达终点时，游泳馆沸腾了，之间孙杨紧握双拳。<sup>34</sup>

(When Sun Yang reached the destination, the aquatic center was ebullient, and Sun Yang clenched his fists during that time). [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

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<sup>32</sup>. See this quote in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 7, 2012.

<sup>33</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>34</sup>. Ibid.



**Example 6:**

He punched the water in delight and let out an extended bellow.<sup>35</sup> [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang's celebration of his reaching the destination first in the swimming pool]

**Example 7:**

Lin displayed his explosiveness in the decider, lashing smashes to pull ahead.<sup>36</sup>  
[referring to the badminton player Lin Dan]

(Xinhuanet)

The athletes' physical violence is being depicted through textual features that represent their strength and power. To demonstrate, the newspapers use vocabularies such as *smash* (砸; za) (in Example 1), *clench* (紧握; jinwo) and *slap* (拍打; paida) (in Example 2), and the nouns such as *strength* (力量; liliang), and *fists* (拳; quan) (in Example 1), as well as the adverb *vigorously* (使劲; shijin) (in Example 3). Descriptive vocabulary which connects strength and vigour and victory in an entelechial continuum with physical violence and dominance depict male achievement as associated with violence, which is a recognition of male athletes as embodiment of dominance in defeating opponents.

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<sup>35</sup>. See Note 29.

<sup>36</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131757711.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131757711.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 3, 2012.

Moreover, although the phrase *punched the water* (in Example 6) is depicting the swimmer Sun Yang's celebration of his success in the water, it reinforces the athlete's strength, and power, as well as his being undefeatable in front of his opponents and in the face of water (which is an abstract form of opponent). Similarly, the noun *explosiveness* and the phrase *lashing smashes* (in Example 7) present male athletes as competing with time (which is as well an abstract form of opponent in the arena) with full strength expressed as destructive violence.

Furthermore, vocabularies such as the adjectives *strong* (强劲; qiangjin) and *powerful* (有力; youli) (in Example 4), and the phrase *clenched his fists* (紧握双拳; jinwo shuangquan) (in Example 5) describe the intense bodily preparation of human beings to fight in confronting opponents. When applied to the representation of male athletes, they are emphasizing male victory as akin to a physical battering of an opponent, indicating a type of directed violence inherent in the athletes and also an acceptance of this characteristic. Consequently, the depictions of male athletes' Olympic victory and breaking of boundaries in the three newspapers are conveyed in violent terms which associate the athletes with supremacy in defeating opponents. The "symbolic merger" (Burke, "Attitudes" 233; see Chapter 4) occurs when we come to need the image of violence, of striking a physical blow, to validate the original impression of strength. However, no corresponding merger occurs in the context of female athletes. In other words, when the news media presuppose that male athletes are representations of physical violence, all the vocabularies that are deployed to depict male athletes will merge with each other in reinforcing such an ideology.

### **Male Representations: Supremacy and Authority**

The third manifestation of the reinforcement of male athletes' agency is conveyed through an association of male athletes with supremacy and authority. This ideology is demonstrated through textual features that depict male athletes with traditional forms of authority such as kings and leaders, an association which is in line with traditional Confucian values which are inherently hierarchical.

According to traditional Confucian conventions, there are five basic types of human relationships, including the relationships between father-son, older brother-younger brother, husband-wife, ruler-government minister, and friend-friend (Lee 28). In each of the first four types of relationships, the first party is always the one that has more authority over the second (Lee 28). On the basis of the traditional Confucian values on human relationships (especially that on gender relationships, as defined in the conventions above), men are accordingly considered as the ones that have more privileges than women (for a more detailed elaboration upon the Confucian background on gender relationships in Chinese society, see Chapter 7). Under this hierarchical gender relationship, men possess more authority in deciding on how to react when in the public eye so as to maintain their dominant gender status as can be shown from the following examples:

**Example 1:**

夺冠后的孙杨一跃坐在了泳绳上，他张开双臂向全世界展示自己的力量，用手势向世界宣告自己是王者，挥拳砸水发泄自己长久压抑的情绪。<sup>37</sup>

(After winning, Sun Yang sat on the swimming ropes with a leap, and opened his arms to show the world his strength, and announced to the world with a gesture that he is a king, as well as smashing the water with his fists to vent his long-repressed emotions). [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

*(China Sports Daily)*

**Example 2:**

While giving high-fives to spectators he passed by and occasionally stretching up his arm to point to the sky, Chen never looked back until hitting the finishing line to pocket his first title in major international competitions.<sup>38</sup> [referring to the head-and-toe walk race athlete Chen Ding]

**Example 3:**

Later he drapped [sic] himself with a Chinese flag and flashed giant grins for cheering fans and photographers.<sup>39</sup> [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

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<sup>37</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>38</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/05/c\\_123529812.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/05/c_123529812.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 5, 2012.

<sup>39</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/05/c\\_131761970.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/05/c_131761970.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 5, 2012.

**Example 4:**

The excited Zhang lay down on the court, before throwing his shoes to the crowd and waving a national flag as celebration.<sup>40</sup> [referring to the badminton player Zhang Nan]

(Xinhuanet)

Male supremacy and authority are being represented through a range of descriptive phrases and clauses. To demonstrate, the phrases *giving high-fives to spectators* and *stretching up his arm to point to the sky* (in Example 2), as well as *throwing his shoes to the crowd* (in Example 4) express a type of self-affirmation of their dominance and supremacy in the sports events and their authorities in claiming fame. Moreover, the identification of male athletes with national flags (a symbol that represents authority and veneration) in clauses *he drapped [sic] himself with a Chinese flag and flashed giant grins* (in Example 3) and *waving a national flag* (in Example 4) associate male authority with patriotism. This patriotism is finally turned into a reinforcement of male rulership when we see the noun *king* (王者; wangzhe) (in Example 1). The vocabulary thus fuses frank expression of victory with traditional images of authority and patriotism in the case of males, while, as I shall demonstrate, withholding a parallel identification from female champions.

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<sup>40</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131760065.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131760065.htm) in Xinhuanet published on August 3, 2012.

## Male Representations: Non-restraint

The last manifestation of male athletes' agency is achieved through depicting the athletes as symbols of non-restraint through a focus on portraying their non-restrained actions both on- and off-the-field in a tolerant, approving manner. To illustrate, I will examine the following examples:

### *Example 1:*

这一天，孙杨挥臂怒吼、兴奋落泪、畅快一笑，让我们看到了一个属于21岁大男孩的率性与纯真。<sup>41</sup>

(On this day, Sun Yang roars while waving arms, sheds tears with excitement, and smiles freely, which shows us the whims and innocence that belong to a 21-year-old boy). [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

### *Example 2:*

夺冠后的孙杨一跃坐在了泳绳上，他张开双臂向全世界展示自己的力量，用手势向世界宣告自己是王者，挥拳砸水发泄自己长久压抑的情绪。<sup>42</sup>

(After winning, Sun Yang sat on the swimming ropes with a leap, and opened his arms to show the world his strength, and announced to the world with a gesture that

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<sup>41</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>42</sup>. See Note 30.

he is a king, as well as smashing the water with his fists to vent his long-repressed emotions.) [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

**Example 3:**

雷声扔掉头盔，仰天长啸。<sup>43</sup>

(Lei Sheng threw away the helmet and shouted into the air). [referring to the fencer Lei Sheng]

**Example 4:**

看着李宗伟的最后一个回球掉出底线，林丹扔掉球拍，张开双臂，满场狂奔，总教练李永波和男单组主教练夏煊泽从椅子上弹起来，追上林丹，三个男人在场地中央忘情地拥抱流泪。<sup>44</sup>

(Seeing Lee Chong Wei's last return dropped out of the baseline, Lin Dan threw away the rackets, opened his arms, and bolted around the field. The head coach Li Yongbo and the coach of men's singles Xia Xuanze bounced up from his chair, caught up with Lin Dan, the three men in the center of the field drunkenly hug and shed tears.)  
[referring to the badminton player Lin Dan]

(*China Sports Daily*)

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<sup>43</sup>. See this quote in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

<sup>44</sup>. See this quote in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 6, 2012.

**Example 5:**

几天前参加一个男子球类比赛赛后新闻发布会，某男单决赛冠军在发布会上上一副盛气凌人的傲气，当一个他家乡的记者问他，你夺冠了想对家乡父老说点啥？冠军男回答：“这个问题你不是在混合区问过了吗？”于是，没作答。<sup>45</sup>

(A few days ago, in attending a subsequent men's ball game press conference, a champion of men's singles showed a domineering arrogance when a reporter from his hometown asked him: "What do you want to say to your fellow countrymen after you won the championship?" The champion man replied: "Haven't you asked this question already in the mixed zone?" So, he didn't answer). [referring to an anonymous athlete]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

**Example 6:**

Sun threw the bouquet to his parents who cheered for him on the audience tribune together with a capacity [*sic*] of Chinese fans.<sup>46</sup> [referring to the swimmer Sun Yang]

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<sup>45</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 9, 2012.

<sup>46</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c\\_131749070.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c_131749070.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on July 31, 2012.



**Example 7:**

The overjoyed Lin rushed around the arena for celebration and threw his vest to the audience, while his rival sat on the court sobbing.<sup>47</sup> [referring to the badminton player Lin Dan]

**Example 8:**

He threw away the racket, dashing out of the court and yelling.<sup>48</sup> [referring to the badminton player Lin Dan]

**Example 9:**

Cai Yun rushed off the court for celebration.<sup>49</sup> [referring to the badminton player Cai Yun]

**Example 10:**

The excited Zhang lay down on the court, before throwing his shoes to the crowd and waving a national flag as celebration.<sup>50</sup> [referring to the badminton player Zhang Nan]

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<sup>47</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c\\_131762977.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c_131762977.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>48</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c\\_131763892.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c_131763892.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>49</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c\\_131763014.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c_131763014.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>50</sup>. See Note 40.

The ideology that male athletes are symbols of acceptable non-restraint is reinforced through the employment of a series of textual features that express male athletes' freedom with expressing excitement for success. For instance, the news discourse employs the verb *announce* (宣告; xuangao) (in Example 2) and *bolt* (狂奔; kuangben) (in Example 4), the verbal phrase *rushed around the arena and threw his vest to the audience* (in Example 7), to name but a few, depicting male athletes as unrestrained in using expressive manners in celebrating their accomplishments in public. Therefore, it is a recognition of male athletes' achievement and an encouragement of them to cross physical boundaries, which is in line with the Olympic motto "Swifter, Higher, and Stronger". As such, the descriptions facilitate a stronger identification of male athletes with the Olympic tradition, and its ethos, which men, it seems, can embody. The credibility the male athletes receive from being associated with the Olympic ethos grants them licence to transgress other kinds of behavioural boundaries in ways that appear closed to women.

Moreover, the direct quotation of the male athlete's reply (*Haven't you asked this question already in the mixed zone?* 这个问题你不是在混合区问过了吗?; zhege wenti ni bushi zai hunhequ wenguole ma?) to the journalist's question (in Example 5) signals the freedom and independence of the athlete with deciding on whether and how to answer the journalist's questions in public. Moreover, the reply also shows that the athlete is controlling the interaction and it is more intense than other athletes' acknowledgement of audience.

Consequently, the reiterations of the moment of victory as a conventional setting for the reportage also consistently deploys vocabulary which gravitates between self-assertion/self-expression and authority, as exemplified directly in vocabulary like “king” and implicitly in behavioural terms in the one athlete’s actual effort to control the reportage.

### **Summary**

An analysis of the ideological meanings of the descriptive textual features in *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet* demonstrates the relationship between the thematic categories of evidence and the Olympic ethos. That ethos is, generally speaking, about achievement, and achievement that transcends boundaries. Therefore, the texts likewise depict the athletes in terms of achievement. However, the specific language used puts the act of achievement on a level that closes it to female participation due to cultural norms. In the following section, I will analyze how the discriminatory gender ideology against female athletes is perpetuated.

#### *Analysis of the Textual Representations of Female Athletes*

An analysis of textual features in the depiction of female athletes in *China Sports Daily*, *Heilongjiang Daily*, and *Xinhuanet* reveals an ambiguous attitude the news discourse communicates towards their achievements. Although the newspapers ostensibly compliment female athletes on their achievements, they also simultaneously undermine the athletes regarding their agency in asserting their competence and accomplishments.

The discriminatory attitude is demonstrated through containing their competence, associating them with ambivalence towards boundary-breaking, overemphasizing their obedience to the coaches and their filial piety to the parents, and similarly paying disproportionate attention to their performance as virtuous wives and caring mothers (which are practices of popular rigid interpretations of the Confucian gender philosophy; for an elaboration upon rigid and selective interpretations of Confucian gender philosophy, see Chapter 7). Female Olympians are thus subject to both objectification and commodification in the process by which their achievements are brought to the attention of the public. Under the headings below, I will explore how these types of gender ideologies are being constructed.

### **Female Representations: Containing Competence**

The first manifestation of the undermining and constraint of female athletes' agency with asserting their accomplishments is shown through three ways of containing their athletic competence. The first type of containment is manifested through textual features that expresses a natural assumption of the disadvantages of female gender identity. The second is expressed through female athletes self-downgrading of their own sports competence by comparing themselves to male athletes' accomplishments. The last is demonstrated through a comparison of female athletes' performance to males' by the news media as if male performance is the standard. As both of the last two means of containing female competence constantly refer to male performance, therefore, I will divide the examples below into two

major categories: those that contain female athletes through a reinforcement of their disadvantaged female gender identity and those that compare their accomplishments against males', to explore how the containment of female competence in Olympic performance is being achieved.

*Reinforcement of the disadvantages of female gender identity*

**Example 1:**

在女双平常的训练中，出现在球网对面的经常会是男陪练，女队员打男队员，当然大部分情况下都会处于劣势。<sup>51</sup>

(In the usual training of women's doubles, the sparring partner is often a male. Female players playing against the male members, of course, will be at a disadvantage in most cases). [referring anonymously to female athletes of badminton doubles]

*(China Sports Daily)*

**Example 2:**

获得两枚金牌的吴敏霞同样有机会，三米板新女王已经收获了四枚奥运会的金牌，加上女性的特殊身份，或许她将在闭幕式上挥舞着五星红旗。<sup>52</sup>

(Wu Minxia, who won two gold medals, would also have the opportunity [to be China's flag bearer]. The new queen has gained four Olympic gold medals in the

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<sup>51</sup>. See this quote in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 7, 2012.

<sup>52</sup>. See this quote in Section 4 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 11, 2012.

three-meter springboard, plus her women's special status, so perhaps she will wave the national flag at the closing ceremony). [referring to the diver Wu Minxia]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

The assumption of the disadvantages of female athletes' female gender identity is shown through the use of vocabularies that indicate an attitude of taken-for-grantedness. For instance, the use of the phrase *of course* (当然; dangran) (in Example 1) signals a broad-reference adverbial. When used in the description of female athletes' ability of defeating male athletes, it conveys a "common sense" that they are constrained by their femaleness and therefore, they are bound to fail in any circumstances when they are competing with male athletes. When the audiences are consenting to the "common sense" expressed in the media, they are accepting the media's gender ideology (cf. Gramsci, "Selections" 12).

In addition, when Wu Minxia's female gender identity is being given extra attention through the phrase *plus her women's special status* (加上女性的特殊身份; jiashang nuxing de teshu shenfen) (in Example 2), Wu's potential to be the flag-bearer for the PRC's Olympic team is to some degree undermined by language use suggestive of an incongruity between her achievements and inherent merit. If her claim is based on "women's special status" ("加上女性的特殊身份; jiashang nuxing de teshu shenfen), which in turn is presented as a kind of additional privilege in the use of the preposition *plus* (加上; jiashang), then that claim is presented under conditions which suggest that she is benefitting from exceptions being made.

The assumption of the disadvantage of being a woman is once again reinforced through the adverb *perhaps* (或许; huoxu) that implies a hesitation of the news media in acknowledging the absolute equal competence of female athletes in being representatives of the national team in the closing ceremony. Therefore, the use of the adverb *perhaps* makes the female athletes' "queen" status (in contrast to that of "king" of the male athlete) contingent on the audience's acceptance. By contrast, when male athletes are portrayed either as "boys" or "men", there is not an implication of their disadvantaged gender identity.

Consequently, the recognition of female athletes' athletic competence is colored with a discriminatory attitude towards their female gender identity, which renders the athletes' remarkable achievements invisible and imposes containment on them in the moment when they are being published.

*Comparison of female athletes' accomplishments against males'*

***Example 3:***

而令人惊叹的最后50米，小叶只花了28秒93，比赢得400米个人混合泳金牌的罗切特用时还少了0.17秒。<sup>53</sup>

(In the stunning final 50 meters, Little Ye only took 28.93 seconds, which is even less than the gold medalist Lochte's for 0.17 seconds in the 400-meter individual medley.)

[referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

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<sup>53</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

**Example 4:**

我们不妨视叶诗文为“水中博尔特”。<sup>54</sup>

(We may consider Ye Shiwen as “[Usain] Bolt in the Water”). [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

(*China Sports Daily*)

**Example 5:**

“...常常和比自己更强的男孩子比试”。<sup>55</sup>

(“And [she] often competes with boys who are much more competent than [her]”).

[referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang’s male coach’s Tong Yuxing’s comments on her]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

**Example 6:**

What made Ye’s win all the more incredible is that she swam the last 50 meters of the race faster than men’s 400 meters medley winner Ryan Lochte had done earlier in the evening.<sup>56</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

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<sup>54</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

<sup>55</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 3, 2012.

<sup>56</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/30/c\\_131748727.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/30/c_131748727.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on July 30, 2012.



**Example 7:**

However, her performances have raised eyebrows, with commentators questioning how she could produce such a dramatically improved performance and also swim the last 50 meters in the 400 meters medley faster than men's 400 meter champion Ryan Lochte.<sup>57</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 8:**

Ye, 16, chopped more than a second off the world record to win the women's 400m individual medley on Saturday with a final 50-meter sprint that was faster than American star Ryan Lochte.<sup>58</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 9:**

In the 400m individual medley final, Ye put on a superfast last leg in 28.93, even faster than Ryan Lochte recorded in the final 50m in men's 400m freestyle event which saw him atop the Olympic podium.<sup>59</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

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<sup>57</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c\\_131751303.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c_131751303.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on July 31, 2012.

<sup>58</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131751564.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131751564.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>59</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131751703.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131751703.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

**Example 10:**

The Chinese swimmer, who set a world record of 4:28.43 in the 400m medley, swam a faster last-50 meters than men's 400m medley winner Ryan Lochte from the United States.<sup>60</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 11:**

Ye said that she was no match with Lochte. "How can I be compared with Lochte," she said. "His 400m result was more than 20 seconds faster than mine, and he was totally relaxed over the last part of the race. But I was trying my best to come back from behind."<sup>61</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 12:**

"Freestyle was my favorite in the medley, but I still cannot be compared with professional men's freestylers," she added.<sup>62</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

(Xinhuanet)

The examples above reveal a containment of female athletes' athletic competence by using male athletes and their performance as standards in evaluating upon females'

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<sup>60</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131757583.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131757583.htm) in Xinhuanet published on August 3, 2012.

<sup>61</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>. Ibid.

achievements. For instance, the newspapers deploy the clauses *which is even less than the gold medalist Lochte's for 0.17 seconds in the 400 meters individual medley* (比赢得 400 米个人混合泳金牌的罗切特用时还少了 0.17 秒; *bi yingde sibaimi gerenhunheyongjinpaide Luo Qiete yongshi haishaole lingdianyiqimiao*) (in Example 3), *even faster than Ryan Lochte recorded in the final 50m in men's 400m freestyle event which saw him atop the Olympic podium* (in Example 9), and the sentence *We may consider Ye Shiwen as "Bolt in the Water"* (我们不妨视叶诗文为“水中博尔特”; *women bufang shi Ye Shiwen wei "Shuizhong Boerte"*) (in Example 4), to name but a few, in praising the athletes. Instead of portraying in detail how Ye has broken the record in the competition field, the news discourse filters her performance through the lens of male athletes' achievements, partially obscuring its singular nature.

In addition to the comments given by the news media on how female athletes' accomplishments are incomparable to males', the athletes' coach's downgrading comments further reinforce the incapacity of the athletes in sports. For example, the news media quotes the coach's words that *"... And [she] often competes with boys who are much more competent than [her]"* (“... 常常和比自己更强的男孩子比试”; *changchang he biziji gengqiangde nanhai bishi*) (in Example 5), which reveals that anonymous boys are collectively held up as more competent than the female athlete. In other words, while the female athlete is established as an individual, literally set apart from the crowd, the anonymous crowd is allowed to set the standard for her. Moreover, ambiguity plays a role here in that the athlete's ability to compete suggests skill, but the wording undermines it. In

all cases, female athletes' identity as an athlete is subsumed in male contexts. Consequently, the reinforcement of female athletes' female gender identity and the constant comparison of their performance against males' are an explicit containment of female competence.

The ideology that male athletes are standards against which female athletes' performance should be assessed is further reinforced when they themselves accept that they are by nature not as competitive as males. While the comments in former examples are given by the news media, those in this category direct towards female athletes' own acceptance of their incapacity of competing with male athletes. To demonstrate, the direct quotations "*How can I be compared with Lochte,*" (in Examples 11) and "*... but I still cannot be compared with professional men's freestylers,*" (in Example 12), to name but a few, seem to be endowing the athlete with agency in evaluating herself; however, the ideological meanings of the contents in the quotations reveal a self-containing attitude the athlete is perpetuating against her own achievements. Consequently, the texts are indicating that even female athletes themselves have recognized and admitted that they are less competent than males.

The representations of female athletes reveal two naturalized assumptions: one is that it is natural to compare an athlete's achievement to the highest known achievement in that sport (which is hard to argue against), while the other is that the highest known achievement is likely to be associated with males. It is difficult to imagine how the journalists could avoid referring to Lochte's (or Usain Bolt's) time in this context given the recognition factor of the male athletes, and their identification with athletic achievement in the public eye. However, female swimmers' accomplishment is made inseparable from Lochte's (or Bolt's), even

consubstantial with it. One has to think of the male swimmer to understand the achievement of the female, to which extent her identity is made dependent on his. When Ye then goes on to say that she cannot be compared with Lochte, the act is ambiguous because it refuses the standard the audience is coached to understand, without establishing an alternative. If the audience accepts that female achievement is only visible through male achievement, then the reportage can be seen to perpetuate a hegemonic male-oriented discourse (cf. Gramsci, “Selections” 12; also Mayr 13). Therefore, if Ye is to be properly recognized, a shift in attention must occur from the existing time she surpassed, to her own action in surpassing it.

### **Female Representations: Ambivalence towards Boundary-Breaking**

The second manifestation of the undermining and constraint of female athletes’ agency in assuming their accomplishments is demonstrated through an ambivalent attitude the journalists express towards the athletes’ boundary-breaking activities in the sports arena. Specifically, the newspapers appear to be complimenting the female athletes on their performance; however, the textual features ultimately undermine the credibility of female athletes’ accomplishments by implicitly qualifying the praise and suggesting an incongruity between female virtue and female achievement. As cases in point, I will deploy the following examples:

**Example 1:**

伦敦四天五战，叶诗文以一破世界纪录、二破奥运会纪录的成绩告诉世界什么叫奇迹。<sup>63</sup>

(In five events across four days in London, Ye Shiwen showed the world what a miracle is by first a world record, and second, an Olympic record-breaking achievement). [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

(*China Sports Daily*)

**Example 2:**

在第五组中国队和德国队的比赛中，郭爽/宫金杰的发挥震撼全场。<sup>64</sup>

(In the fifth set of the game between Chinese and the German teams, Guo Shuang/Gong Jinjie's performance shocked the audience). [referring to the cyclists Guo Shuang and Gong Jinjie]

**Example 3:**

评点高颂在和捷克队、克罗地亚队比赛中的表现，可用“惊艳”一词形容。<sup>65</sup>

(In commenting on Gao Song's performance in the competitions with Czech Republic and Croatia teams, we can use “amazing” to describe it). [referring to Chinese Women's basketball team]

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<sup>63</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

<sup>64</sup>. See Note 55.

<sup>65</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 1, 2012.

**Example 4:**

被视为中国夺得游泳金牌的有力候选人之一焦刘洋，曾在训练中游出 2 分 01 秒，其教练刘海涛称此成绩是他“从未见过的”。<sup>66</sup>

(Jiao Liuyang, who is considered one of the strong candidates for China to win the gold medal, once used 2 minutes and 1 second in training, of which her coach Liu Haitao says “such a record is one that he has never seen before”). [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

**Example 5:**

中国蝶泳名将焦刘洋到底在伦敦奥运会能有多快，她的主管教练刘海涛并不知道，但他 25 日透露：“小焦最近在训练中游出了 2 分 01 秒，是以前从未见过的成绩。”<sup>67</sup>

(As for how fast Chinese butterfly champion Jiao Liuyang could swim in London Olympics, her head coach Liu Haitao did not know. But on the 25<sup>th</sup> he said: “Little Jiao just used 2 minutes 01 second in a recent training, which is a performance that he has never seen before”) [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

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<sup>66</sup>. See this quote in Section 7 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 27, 2012.

<sup>67</sup>. Ibid.

**Example 6:**

谈起李艳凤，61岁的父亲李凤祥非常自豪：“没想到女儿能取得这么大的成绩，能为国家争光，我原来就想让她离开农村，不让她种地就行。”<sup>68</sup>

(Talking about Li Yanfeng, her 61-year-old father Li Fengxiang is very proud: “I did not expect my daughter to be so successful and win such a glory for the country, I originally wanted her to leave the countryside so she would no longer [have to] farm the land”). [referring to the discus thrower Li Yanfeng]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

**Example 7:**

What made Ye’s win all the more incredible is that she swam the last 50 meters of the race faster than men’s 400 meters medley winner Ryan Lochte had done earlier in the evening.<sup>69</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 8:**

However, her performances have raised eyebrows, with commentators questioning how she could produce such a dramatically improved performance and also swim the last 50 meters in the 400 meters medley faster than men’s 400 meter champion Ryan Lochte.<sup>70</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

(*Xinhuanet*)

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<sup>68</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>69</sup>. See Note 56.

<sup>70</sup>. See Note 57.



In the examples above, although female athletes have displayed outstanding performance, the languages used to describe their achievements indicate surprise towards their boundary-breaking activities in sports arena. If female athletes' capability of making any type of immense achievements were considered normal, the news discourse would not use vocabularies such as *miracle* (奇迹; qiji) (in Example 1), and *shocked* (震撼; zhenhan) (in Example 2), *amazing* (惊艳; jingyan) (in Example 3), as well as *has never seen before* (in Example 4 and Example 5) in expressing a surprising attitude towards the athletes' accomplishments.

The hesitation to recognize female athletes' success is further reinforced through the adjective *incredible* (in Example 7), the phrase *raised eyebrows*, and the clause *questioning how she could produce such a dramatically improved performance* (in Example 8), each of which signals an increasing suspicion of the authenticity of the athletes' breakthrough. Therefore, the clusters of terms used to record reactions to female success subtly tip the balance from surprised admiration to an ambiguous state in which the credibility of the female achievement is uncertain or destabilized.

When we encounter the first term *miracle*, we may have a sense of the complimentary attitude the newspapers are expressing towards female athletes' performance. However, when the scale of surprise grows more and more intense, i.e. from "miracle", "shock", to "amazing", and then to "has never seen/expected before", the complimentary attitude towards the athletes' achievement gradually acquires negative connotations, shaping the audience's response from a kind of excitement at something new to an attitude in which strong

achievement by women seems at least mildly unthinkable and becomes an object of distrust.

The element of surprise permits a merger of positive and negative response in which the negative comes to dominate. Consequently, when positive and negative attitude toward female athletes' competence and performance are put together, the negative becomes the attitude coached in the audience (cf. Burke, "On Symbols" 182).

In addition to the comments provided by the newspapers on the athletes' performance, the newspapers also quote directly the male coaches' first-hand experience with the average athletic skills of the female athletes in daily training as evidence of the unusualness of the athletes' outstanding performance in the Olympic Games. For instance, the newspapers use the clauses *which her coach Liu Haitao says "such a record is one that he has never seen before* (此成绩是他“从未见过的; ci chengji shita “congwei jianguo de”) (in Example 4), *which is a performance that he has never seen before* (从未见过的成绩; congwei jianguo de chengji) (in Example 5), and *I did not expect* (没想到; mei xiangdao) (in Example 6) so as to express a naturalized assumption that female athletes normally cannot make any outstanding performances and the sudden breakthrough in the Olympic Games automatically is really beyond people's expectations, and therefore is suspicious.<sup>71</sup>

This suspicion of female athletes' capability of achieving success in the Olympic Games is further reinforced through quoting an athlete's father's stereotypical assumption of what his daughter can achieve in her career. To demonstrate, the newspaper quotes directly Li Yanfeng's father's comment on her performance that "... *I originally wanted her to leave the*

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<sup>71</sup>. See Note 4.

*countryside so she would no longer [have to] farm the land*” (“... 我原来就想让她离开农村，不让她种地就行”；“... wo yuanlai jiu xiang rang ta likai nongcun, bu rang ta zhongdi jiuxing”) (in Example 6), which conveys the father’s attitude that although he does not want his daughter to be a farm labourer, he has never dreamt of the remarkable achievement his daughter can make. The text gently curbs the extent to which the female athlete is expected to succeed. Therefore, it entails not only a potentially unwelcoming attitude but also resistance to the authenticity of female athletes’ competence and accomplishments.

Moreover, both the male coach and the father’s comments on the individual female athlete’s performance reveal the role of the patriarchal power in predetermining the extent to which the “daughter” (male coaches can also be considered as belonging to the athlete’s father-generation) can succeed (although the “daughter” finally broke the “father’s” presumptions of what his daughter can achieve). As a result, the compliments on female athletes’ achievements comprise a continuum from mere surprise to suspicion, with the ultimate emphasis falling on the negative emotional content. Consequently, when the ambivalence of female athletes’ boundary-breaking becomes the ultimate term, all “symbolic mergers” (Burke 1984, 233) are employed to make this ideology prominent.

### **Female Representations: Obedience to Authorities (Coaches)**

The third manifestation of the discrimination against female athletes’ competence and achievements is reflected through an emphasis put on portraying their obedience to

authorities (coaches, in this context). To demonstrate, I will draw upon the following examples:

***Example 1:***

这个时候，坐在场边的教练薛保全马上起身，郭文珺也“知趣”地放下枪走向了教练。薛保全拍着郭文珺的肩膀，说了很长时间。<sup>72</sup>

(At this moment, when Guo Wenjun saw coach Xue Baoquan standing up, Guo Wenjun also immediately put down the gun and walked toward her coach who was sitting on the sidelines. Xue Baoquan patted Guo Wenjun's shoulder and talked to her for long time). [referring to the shooter Guo Wenjun]

***Example 2:***

自知最后一组打得不好的郭文珺有些不好意思，走到场边蹲到教练薛保全身边，师徒俩再次交流了好一会。<sup>73</sup>

(Knowing that she didn't play well in the final group, the embarrassed Guo Wenjun went to the sidelines and squatted down to coach Xue Baoquan. Both teacher and student exchanged words for a while again). [referring to the shooter Guo Wenjun]

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<sup>72</sup>. See this quote in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>73</sup>. Ibid.

**Example 3:**

“这个小姑娘从来不吵不闹，你给她多少任务，她都会完成”。<sup>74</sup>

(“This girl never quarrels, and no matter how many tasks you give her, she will complete them”). [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 4:**

别说，叶诗文的气质、特点还真和刘子歌有相同之处，同样的人淡如菊，同样的刻苦努力，同样的乖巧听话。<sup>75</sup>

(Without doubt, Ye Shiwen’s temperament and characteristics really have something in common with Liu Zige’s – the same coolness like a chrysanthemum, the same capacity for hard work, and same well-behaved obedient manner.) [referring to the swimmers Ye Shiwen and Liu Zige]

**Example 5:**

教练交代游10000米，她只会游12000米，绝不会游9900米，丝毫不会偷懒。<sup>76</sup>

(If the coach orders her to swim 10,000 m, she will only swim 12,000 m but never swim 9900 m, and there is no laziness at all). [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

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<sup>74</sup>. See this quote in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>75</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

**Example 6:**

周璐璐的启蒙教练杜师说：“别的没什么，璐璐这孩子就一点好，不怕苦，不怕累，教练让怎么练就怎么练。”<sup>77</sup>

(Zhou Lulu’s abecedarian coach Du Shi says: “If nothing else, Lulu is good just for one point – she is not afraid of hardship and tiredness, and she will practise in whichever way the coach orders her to.”) [referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

**Example 7:**

“教练说什么，我就做什么。”<sup>78</sup>

(Whatever the coach says, I’ll do it accordingly.) [referring to the shooter Yi Siling]

**Example 8:**

“她很乖巧，每次轮到她干活，都做得很仔细。洗碗、倒垃圾，打扫卫生，会把厨房整理得干干净净。”省游泳运动管理中心副主任卢刚回忆道。<sup>79</sup>

(“She is very obedient, and whenever it is her turn to work, she does it very carefully.

Washing dishes, taking out the trash, cleaning the kitchen, she will make the kitchen neat and tidy”. Lu Gang, deputy director of the provincial swimming sports management center recalls.) [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

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<sup>77</sup>. See this quote in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 7, 2012.

<sup>78</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 8, 2012.

<sup>79</sup>. See this quote in Section 5 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 2, 2012.

**Example 9:**

In coach Wei Wei's eyes, Ye was very self-disciplined who, unlike children of her age, never skipped training sessions.<sup>80</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 10:**

"Ordered to swim 1,000 meters, she would usually volunteer to make it 3,000," Wei said. "That's how she trained."<sup>81</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 11:**

"The most difficult time for me was 2009, when I was not at that strong physically and I also had problems of confidence. I also had a disagreement with my coach and also had to change my techniques," she explained.<sup>82</sup> [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

(Xinhuanet)

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<sup>80</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131753620.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131753620.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>81</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/02/c\\_131754697.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/02/c_131754697.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 2, 2012.

In the examples above, female athletes' obedience to the coaches is being constructed through both their own and the coaches' verbal and non-verbal languages. In Example 1, the adverb *immediately* (知趣”地; zhiqu di) expresses a type of trained spontaneous reaction of female athletes upon the coaches' gestures that signal the necessity to have a discussion regarding their performance in the arena. In Example 2, although the phrase *squatted down* (蹲到; dundao) in principle merely describes a process of lowering one's body, when we have had the context that the athlete was feeling embarrassed for her poor performance, the term's potential to hint at awkwardness, if not overt submission, prompts us to attribute a heightened sense of guilt to the athlete. Therefore, it lends an emotional colouring to all her subsequent actions, if for example the act of squatting suggests submissiveness to her coach as a signal of her compensation for her poor performance. While male athletes are represented as independent in employing any techniques in competition, female athletes are portrayed as attentive to their coaches' directions, which is a reflection of the athlete's obedience to authorities.

While the first two instances draw upon female athletes' non-verbal languages in depicting their obedience to authorities, Examples 3 to 7 put emphasis on depicting their verbal nonresistance against the coaches' assignments. For instance, the phrase *never quarrels* (从来不吵不闹; conglai buchaobunao) and the clause *no matter how many tasks you give her, she will complete them* (你给她多少任务, 她都会完成; ni geita duoshao renwu, ta douhui wancheng) (in Example 3), to name but a few, indicate the unlimited authority of the coaches and the boundless obedience of the female athletes to the coaches.



Meanwhile, the use of adverbs of negation *never/not* (从不/不) in *never quarrels* (i.e. 从来不会吵不闹; cong lai bu chao bu nao) (in Example 3), and *there is no laziness at all* (i.e. 丝毫不会偷懒; si hao bu hui tou lan) (in Example 5), to name but a few, indicates that the one area in which women's surpassing barriers is truly recognized is in demonstrating boundless obedience to the coaches.

In addition to the deployment of the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the athletes, the news discourse exploits simultaneously the athletes' personalities of being thoughtful and diligent with training as a manifestation of their obedience to the coaches. To demonstrate, the news discourse uses the phrase *very obedient* (她很乖巧; ta hen guai qiao) and the clause *whenever it is her turn to work, she does it very carefully* (每次轮到她干活, 都做得很仔细; mei ci lun dao ta gan huo) (in Example 8), and the adjectival phrase *very self-disciplined* and the clause *never skipped training sessions* (in Example 9), to name but a few, in indicating the absolute authority of the coaches and the absolute obedience of the athletes in taking up the training tasks. Moreover, the phrase *very self-disciplined* seems also to suggest that female athletes are not usually (or cannot be expected to be) self-disciplined. Therefore, when the athletes show extreme discipline of themselves, it surprises the coach.

Lastly, the direct quotations in the news discourse seem to be complimenting female athletes on their work ethics; however, they are actually expressing an expectation of female athletes' obedience to the coaches (see Examples 3, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11). Therefore, the clustered terms and the general shift in the terms connect them ultimately with dependence and obedience rather than with achievement.

### **Female Representations: Filial Piety to Authorities (Parents)**

In addition to the representations of female athletes' obedience to one type of authority – the coaches, as analysed in the previous section, the news discourse simultaneously depicts them as practitioners of filial piety to another type of authority – parents. Specifically, the means by which the athletes demonstrate their filial piety to their parents can be found in the concrete actions that they take and the verbal acknowledgments that they convey to their parents for their support, which indicates that the athletes' agency is only visible when channelled through the filial piety they perform to parents. In the following two subsections, I will explore how female athletes are portrayed as embodiments of the virtue of filial piety from the two perspectives.

#### *Filial piety through concrete actions of thoughtfulness*

##### ***Example 1:***

“My family owns an orchard where they grow apples. I tried to go there and work for a while and help them out, but when I entered the orchard I was too big,” she said.<sup>83</sup>

[referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

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<sup>83</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/06/c\\_131763145.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/06/c_131763145.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

**Example 2:**

And whenever she got time to return, Ye would “treasure” the time and sometimes spend the whole day to knit a rose for her mom.<sup>84</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 3:**

This is her first time to the Olympic arena. “I didn’t have a goal before coming here, just telling myself to do the best.” She made a phone call to her parents.<sup>85</sup> [referring to the badminton player Zhao Yunlei] (Xinhuanet)

The concrete actions of thoughtfulness that the athletes take in showing their filial piety to their parents can be found in the phrases *tried to go there*, *work for a while*, and *help them out* (in Example 1), *knit a rose for her mom* (in Example 2), as well as *made a phone call to her parents* (in Example 3), which presents us the activeness and enthusiasm of the athletes in engaging activities that can to some extent relieve the manual labour of their parents. Moreover, the direct quotation of the athlete’s own description of the specific things that she does in helping her parents out in the sentence “... *I tried to go there and work for a while and help them out, but when I entered the orchard I was too big*,” (in Example 1) is a

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<sup>84</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131753620.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131753620.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>85</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131760065.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131760065.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 3, 2012.

reinforcement of the athlete's internalized consciousness of performing filial piety to her parents even on occasions that are unsuitable for her.

Consequently, the textual features used in the examples reinforce the absolute authority of the parents and the absolute filial piety that the athletes are expected to practise to the parents, which ultimately connects female athletes with submissiveness and obedience rather than with accomplishment. The disproportionate emphasis placed on filial piety reveals that these athletes only come into focus as individuals in contexts where they are performing acts associated with the texts that are most comfortable with expressing female agency in traditional contexts. This prescribed range of options for self-expression contrasts sharply with the broader range of expressive options available to male athletes.

*Filial piety through acknowledgment of parents' support*

***Example 4:***

“They had been very supportive, not calling me and sending me text messages during the training after I arrived here. So I briefed them [on] my victory.”<sup>86</sup> [referring to the badminton player Zhao Yunlei]

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<sup>86</sup>. See Note 85.

**Example 5:**

“My blessings go to my parents and every single one of my supporters,” she said.<sup>87</sup>

[referring to the Tibetan race walker Choeyang Kyi]

**Example 6:**

Chen had begun her press conference by thanking Wang for being her partner, as well

as showing her gratitude to her family and coaches.<sup>88</sup> [referring to the diver Chen

Ruolin]

(Xinhuanet)

Another way of highlighting female athletes’ filial piety for parents is shown through a portrayal of their acknowledgment of parents’ support. The acknowledgement is either expressed by the athletes themselves or indicated by the news media’s comments. In the former case, the athletes said “*They had been very supportive, not calling me and sending me text messages during the training after I arrived here*” (in Example 4) and “*My blessings go to my parents*” (in Example 5). The direct quotations of the athletes’ acknowledgment of their parents’ support manifest that the sense of gratitude has been deeply rooted in their minds and they remember to practise this conventional virtue at all times.

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<sup>87</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/12/c\\_131780014.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/12/c_131780014.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 12, 2012.

<sup>88</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131751605.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131751605.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

The reinforcement of female athletes' filial piety for their parents is represented most intensely when we see the use of *gratitude* in the clause *showing her gratitude to her family* (in Example 6), which is the "ultimate term" (in Burke's words) that summarizes and clarifies the symbolic meanings of all the "actions" that the media is taking in depicting female athletes' filial piety to the parents. When female athletes' own consciousness of performing filial piety and the media's expectations of them to demonstrate conventional morality co-occur in the news discourse, the best female players become the best practitioners of performing filial piety to the parents. In other words, while male athletes are excelling through exceeding conformity, women are succeeding by the sheer extent to which they conform.

Although there is one example on the representation of a male athlete's filial piety to his parents (i.e. on Sun Yang), his gratitude for his parents' support is demonstrated through his non-verbal action of throwing the bouquet to his parents who are sitting in the audience seat after he obtained championship.<sup>89</sup> When Sun Yang demonstrates filial piety, not only does his action appear to some degree extraordinary (i.e. it is a behaviour that exceeds what is expected of him as a male champion), but his expression of it likewise lines up with the kind of unrestrained self-expression permitted more or less exclusively to males. By contrast, the female athletes' thankfulness to their parents is being demonstrated through their own verbal acknowledgment, which reveals that conventional morality is imposed on female athletes as conventional, while male athletes are able, and are perhaps expected to act beyond the

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<sup>89</sup>. See Note 46.

constraints of convention. Accordingly, female athletes are represented as filial daughters rather than as competent athletes and it is a “deflection” (Burke 1945, 59) of the audiences’ attention from the athletes’ competence and achievements.

### **Female Representations: Caring Mothers and Virtuous Wives**

The next manifestation of the discriminatory gender attitude the news discourse expresses towards female athletes’ agency with acknowledging accomplishments is constructed through an association of the athletes with traditional familial roles such as being caring mothers and virtuous wives. To demonstrate, I will draw upon the following examples:

#### ***Example 1:***

她生完孩子后，我们大家明显感觉她更加成熟了，也许是孩子让她有了更多的动力和责任感。<sup>90</sup>

(After she gave birth, we have obviously felt that she is more mature. Perhaps it is because having a child has given her more power and responsibility). [referring to the shooter Guo Weijun]

#### ***Example 2:***

虽然处在调整期，但结婚生子对她比赛成绩的影响其实并不大。<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>91</sup>. Ibid.

(Although she is in the adjustment period, there is in fact no great impact of marriage and children on her competition scores). [referring to the shooter Guo Weijun]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

The depictions of the familial roles female athletes are playing as shown in the examples above imply that female athletes' competence lies in domestic rather than in the competitive public domains. For example, the newspapers comment that *having a child has given her more power and responsibility* (孩子让她有了更多的动力和责任感; haizi rang ta you le gengduo de dongle he zerengan) (in Example 1) indicating that female athletes are more acceptable in the public eye if they are seen playing roles such as caring mothers and virtuous wives rather than their professional roles as competitors and victors. In addition, the clause *there is in fact no great impact of marriage and children on her competition scores* (结婚生子对她比赛成绩的影响其实并不大; jiehunshengzi duita bisaichengji de yingxiang qishi bing bu da) (in Example 2) expresses an assumption that usually women's competence will tend to be affected once they have given birth, as demonstrated most intensively from the phrase *in fact* – one that expresses factual information.

The concurrent reference to female athletes' good performance in both domestic and professional areas (i.e. responsibility for their children at home and gaining good race scores in sports arena at the same time in this context) reveals that if a woman wants to be recognized by the society, she has to make extra efforts and demonstrate competence in a variety of areas at the same time, to an extent not required by males.



## Female Representations: Objectification

Disregard for female athletes' agency in the ostensible assertion of their success is also communicated through an objectification of them by an emphasis put on portraying their physical strength, attractiveness, appearance, as well as the appropriate emotions that they are expected to employ in public. Consequently, by using the examples below, I will explore how the four types of the objectification of female athletes are constructed semantically through the recurrence of key terms across a variety of textual contexts.

### *Depictions of physical strength*

#### ***Example 1:***

易思玲刚接触体育时练的是长跑，不过，身体相对柔弱的易思玲最后在父亲的干预下没能沿着这条路走下去。<sup>92</sup>

(Yi Siling was practising long-distance running when she just started to dabble in sports. However, due to her father's intervention, the physically unremarkable girl could not go down this road). [referring to the shooter Yi Siling]

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<sup>92</sup>. See this quote in Section 4 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 29, 2012.

**Example 2:**

后来，当地的体校老师到学校选材，这个外表柔弱的小姑娘一下子进入了视野，从此步入射击运动的行列。<sup>93</sup>

(Later, when the local sports-school teachers came to select potential athletes at the school, this fragile-looking girl came into view at once, from then on she entered the ranks of the shooting sports). [referring to the shooter Yi Siling]

(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

The first type of the objectification of female athletes is demonstrated through an emphasis on the disadvantage of their physical conditions. For instance, the news discourse employs the phrases *physically unremarkable* (身体相对柔弱; shenti xiangdui rouruo) (in Example 1) and *fragile-looking girl* (外表柔弱; waibiao rouruo) (in Example 2), which conveys an assumption that by being fragile, or otherwise “unremarkable”, she engages more attention for her physical disadvantage. Therefore, the reportage makes a spectacle of the female athlete simply as a physical being whose appearance must be assessed before her achievements. In other words, women are subjected to a host of levels of assessment before their performance even comes into view.

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<sup>93</sup>. Ibid.

### *Depictions of attractiveness*

#### ***Example 3:***

Both her diving coach and ballet teacher wanted to nurture the pretty girl.<sup>94</sup> [referring to the diver Wu Minxia]

#### ***Example 4:***

“And when you like weightlifting you do not think about body shape or whether it’s feminine,” said Zhou.<sup>95</sup> [referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

*(Xinhuanet)*

While the first perspective on the objectification of female athletes expresses a naturalized assumption of the disadvantages with female physical conditions, the second turns to an expectation of ideal female physical types, with conventional and unconventional approaches to “femininity”. To illustrate, the employment of the adjective *pretty* (in Example 3) sounds as if being good-looking is a useful basic requirement of female athletes who wish to be considered as students by famous coaches. Moreover, although the sports event that the female athlete is expert in requires her body shape to meet the requirement of that sports

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<sup>94</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c\\_131763198.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c_131763198.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>95</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/06/c\\_131763145.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/06/c_131763145.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

event, the direct quotation of her response to her body shape in the clause *when you like weightlifting you do not think about body shape or whether it's feminine* (in Example 4) ostensibly challenges the “pretty” stereotype but is in fact still taking a “feminine” body shape as a reference point.

### *Depictions of appearance*

#### **Example 5:**

焦刘洋一身休闲装束，很宽松的灰色 T 恤，过膝的牛仔短裤，白色球鞋，光泽的短发和明亮的眼神相映。<sup>96</sup>

(Jiao Liuyang is casually dressed: very loose gray T-shirt, knee-length denim shorts, white sneakers, and shiny short hair matched with bright eyes.) [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

#### **Example 6:**

看上去就像一个返家的邻家女学生。<sup>97</sup>

([She] looks like a schoolgirl next door who just came back home). [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

*(Heilongjiang Daily)*

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<sup>96</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 8, 2012.

<sup>97</sup>. Ibid.

**Example 7:**

“As a little girl, she looked like a boy because of her short hair,” he continued.<sup>98</sup>

[referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 8:**

“Actually she wanted so much to wear long hair like other girls, but couldn’t do so because of her training.”<sup>99</sup> [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

(Xinhuanet)

The third type of the objectification of female athletes focuses on the representations of the athletes’ appearance through a detailed portrayal of both their clothing and hairstyle. The references to schoolgirls and childhood not only associate the athletes with immaturity, but also establish a childlike “look” as the ideal the athletes must meet to be acceptable in the public eye. For instance, the news media uses the nouns *schoolgirl* (女学生; nuxuesheng) (in Example 6) describes an overall impression that the female athlete left on the audience, and *T-shirt* (T恤; tixu), *sneakers* (球鞋; qiuxie), and *shorts* (短裤; duanku) (in Example 5) to portray the design of the athlete’s clothes. While the adjectives *loose* (宽松; kuansong) and *knee-length* (过膝的; guoxi de) (in Example 5) depict the style of the athlete’s clothing, *white* (白色; baise) (in Example 5) tells the colour of the athlete’s clothing. Moreover, the

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<sup>98</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c\\_131753620.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/01/c_131753620.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>99</sup>. Ibid.

representation of the athletes' appearance is even specific down to the material of their clothes, shown from the adjective *denim* (牛仔; niuzai) (in Example 5). The promotion of a childlike "schoolgirl" standard of beauty in athletes is very disturbing when their training and self-discipline should reflect maturity and self-determination. Therefore, the consistent deployment of such details, which are not symbolic in themselves, represent a critical scrutiny of the physical appearance of female athletes which has no parallel for male athletes.

In addition to the portrayal of the athletes' clothing, the news discourse also focuses on the depiction of the athletes' hairstyle in reinforcing an implicit requirement of "proper" feminine appearance. For instance, the news discourse says that the athlete has *shiny short hair matched with bright eyes* (光泽的短发和明亮的眼神相映; guangze de duanfa he mingliang de yanshen xiangying) (in Example 5). But due to the restraint of the sports event that she has engaged in, she is unable to keep long hair as conveyed in the sentence *she wanted so much to wear long hair like other girls, but couldn't do so because of her training* (in Example 8). The requirement of unifying the hair styles of female athletes with males' is demonstrated most intensively in the sentence *she looked like a boy because of her short hair* (in Example 7), which reveals the dominance of a male standard in requiring female athletes' appearance in sports and also some evidence of a kind of "misfit" in identity of girls who cannot properly be either girls or boys.

Consequently, the agency of these women is subverted in the reportage into either irrelevant standards of physical beauty, demeaning subjection to standards which make them out to be like children, or, at best, into standards of physical appearance which de-sex them

entirely by making them out to be neither wholly female nor male, just as they are not allowed to be either fully children, or fully adults.

*Depictions of appropriate emotions*

**Example 9:**

易思玲此时已经绽放幸福的笑容，不断向中国记者和观众致意。<sup>100</sup>

(Yi Siling blooms a happy smile at this time and constantly pays tribute to the Chinese reporters and spectators.) [referring to the shooter Yi Siling]

**Example 10:**

在混合区叶诗文笑得开心灿烂。<sup>101</sup>

(Ye Shiwen smiled brightly and happily in the mixed zone.) [referring to the swimmer Ye Shiwen]

**Example 11:**

赛后，各国记者在混合区把焦刘洋围个水泄不通，开朗率真的她掩饰不住激动喜悦的心情，满脸洋溢着笑。<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>. See this quote in Section 4 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 29, 2012.

<sup>101</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>102</sup>. See this quote in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 3, 2012.

(After the competition, Jiao Liuyang was swarmed by journalists of different countries in the mixed zone. The outgoing and frank girl could not conceal her excitement and joy, and her face was filled with smiles). [referring to the swimmer Jiao Liuyang]

**Example 12:**

决赛结束，下了赛车，郭爽笑了，笑得那么开心，那么灿烂！<sup>103</sup>

(When the finals ended, Guo Shuang got off her racing bicycle and smiled. She smiled so happily, so brightly!) [referring to the cyclist Guo Shuang]

*(Heilongjiang Daily)*

**Example 13:**

Olympic silver medalist Ding Ning was all smiles and seemingly back to herself again in Friday's team event.<sup>104</sup> [referring to the table tennis player Ding Ning]

**Example 14:**

She smiled a lot during the final 20 km.<sup>105</sup> [referring to the Tibetan race walker

Choeyang Kyi]

*(Xinhuanet)*

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<sup>103</sup>. See this quote in Section 4 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 4, 2012.

<sup>104</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131760023.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131760023.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 3, 2012.

<sup>105</sup>. See this quote at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/12/c\\_131780014.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/12/c_131780014.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 12, 2012.



The last type of the objectification of female athletes is manifested through phrases that reinforce the appropriate emotions they are expected to present in public. In the instances above, a shared emphasis put on depicting female athletes is on their smiles. To illustrate, the athletes either *blooms a happy smile* (绽放幸福的笑容; zhanfang xingfu de xiaorong) (in Example 9), or *smiled brightly and happily* (笑得开心灿烂; xiao de kaixin canlan) (in Example 10), or *filled with smiles* (洋溢着笑; yangyi zhe xiao) (in Example 11), to name but a few. The representations reveal that smiles (in contrast to the instinctive/primal emotional displays in male athletes) are appropriate feminine emotions and that there is a line between appropriate acknowledgement of achievement and unseemly displays of excitement, pleasure, or pride, although this restriction only applies to female athletes in the coverage.

As Bartky says, “[i]n contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical, male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment” (140). Under patriarchal gender values, “wom[e]n [live] [their] bod[ies] as seen by another” (Bartky 140) and “image themselves in response to being imagined” (Felstiner 250). The representations of the various feminine characteristics form an objectification of female athletes that expects them to conform to a male standard. Meanwhile, the emphasis “deflects” (in Burke’s term) the audience’s attention from the athletes’ competence and remarkable performance to their physical characteristics and controls what we see as the most significant in the athletes.

### **Female Representations: Enthusiasm about Leisure Activity**

The last perspective that undermines female athletes' agency in asserting success is demonstrated through a heavy emphasis on portraying them in the context of determinedly feminine leisure activity, to create a sense of their interests and appetites being stereotypically female, even if their looks and their Olympic events are not. As a case in point, I will examine the following examples:

#### ***Example 1:***

Saying that she loves shopping but had not had time to do so in London.<sup>106</sup> [referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

#### ***Example 2:***

"I am a [P]isces so I like romantic and pretty stuff. I also love shopping but I usually don't buy, because I can seldom find the suitable clothes. I just like being [*sic*] a company with my friends when we shop."<sup>107</sup> [referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

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<sup>106</sup>. See Note 95.

<sup>107</sup>. Ibid.

**Example 3:**

Before returning back to China the next day after she won, Zhou said the one thing she has to do is to shop at the airport.<sup>108</sup> [referring to the weightlifter Zhou Lulu]

(Xinhuanet)

The examples above focus on the weightlifter Zhou Lulu, whose body image is the one that least corresponds to male-centred perceptions of “prettiness”. However, there is a clear effort here to “feminize” her by locating her outside-of-competition life in what seems to be considered an appropriately feminine leisure activity, i.e. shopping for pretty or suitable clothes. To demonstrate, the news discourse uses clauses *she loves shopping* (in Example 1), *I like romantic and pretty stuff* and *I can seldom find the suitable clothes* (in Example 2), to name but a few, depict her as a passionate pursuer of materialistic satisfactions and as consumer and participant in transactional rather than transcendent activities. Moreover, the direct quotation of the athlete’s own statement regarding her hobby of shopping, in the sentence “*I am a [P]isces so I like romantic and pretty stuff. ...*” (in Example 2) indicates that female athletes are genuine passionate pursuers of materialistic satisfaction, as they themselves have admitted it. The association of Zhou Lulu with consumption in these examples indicates that she has no imaginative life outside of consumption of goods and it suggests that the real subtext here is finding a way to emphasize her femininity in a context that the audience will readily accept.

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<sup>108</sup>. Ibid.

## Summary

A description of the textual features used in each category of female representations demonstrates an overall impression of female athletes' passivity and lack of agency rather than their being able to maintain certain standards of behaviour while controlling their situation. The idea of surpassing boundaries, in accord with the Olympic motto of "Swifter, Higher, and Stronger" is quietly excluded from the representation, in an overarching act of rhetorical "deflection" away from concepts of female competence and agency which the audience might perceive as being at variance with "proper" standards of feminine behaviour.

The description of the linguistic features of the news texts reveals the dominant gender ideologies that the news discourse perpetuates in portraying male and female athletes. As a product of the process of news production and as a resource in interpreting gender relations, the news texts provide us a lens through which we can examine the power of news discourse in perpetuating gender ideologies. Therefore, in the last section of this chapter, I will proceed to the second step of conducting CDA, which is the interpretation of how the textual features interact in exerting ideological control on people's perception of gender relations.

### *Critical Discourse Interpretation of the Textual Representations*

The discursive representations of male and female athletes in the news discourse demonstrate Fairclough's principles of "order of discourse", "interdiscursivity", and "power behind discourse", and Althusser's insights into how "ideology" influences people's

worldview, as well as Gramsci's theory of how "hegemony" works in engaging the audience in willingly perpetuating a particular type of ideology.

Firstly, consistent affirmation and recognition of male agency in asserting success and containment of female agency in the news discourse forms the "order of discourse" in portraying gender relations. As elaborated upon in Chapter 2, "order of discourse" in Fairclough's definition refers to the "particular articulations of discourses, genres and styles that are relatively stabilized around networks of social practices such as the field of media or politics" (*Interview with Norman Fairclough*; qtd. in Rogers 9). In the news discourse, representations of the athletes across the three newspapers consistently divide male and female athletes into two entirely opposite worlds. While male athletes are capable of making achievements in all sports events, female athletes have to struggle to make extra efforts in order to be recognized (such as they have to excel in both domestic and professional spheres at the same time).

Moreover, an examination of the news discourse in an interdiscursive level shows that the "order of discourse" is being constructed through textual features that express relatively stabilized ideologies. Specifically, men are praised for demonstrating their masculinity in the ways they embody the breaking of barriers, while women, far from being praised, are largely shown as admirable for the ways in which they conform to convention, which reveals that the unequal gender power relation resides primarily in the association of males with power, and the accompanying dissociation of femininity and power. When male power becomes entrenched and remains inaccessible to females, "irrespective of the basis upon which such

exclusion is carried out” (Thompson 151), a systematic unequal gender power relation is being shaped.

Secondly, the ideology of gender inequality the news discourse perpetuates is based upon an imaginary definition of gender relations which does not reflect the reality. Biological difference is not by definition a criterion that determines superiority and inferiority. Rather, attitudes toward gender and difference are the means through which people are empowered or disempowered with regard to gender. Moreover, the gender roles men and women are expected to play are productions of socialization which are thus subject to change (Schmitz 177). Therefore, the consistent reinforcement of a hierarchical gender value in the news discourse is merely “impose[ing] on the vast majority of men ... *a will*” (Althusser, “For Marx” 233-234; emphasis original) that men are superior to women, which is in fact a play of ideology.

Lastly, the normalization of the unequal gender relationships in the news media reveal the power of the “‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, “Selections” 12). Specifically, the news media follow traditional ideology in reporting on female Olympians in ways that circumscribe their capacity to be seen as living up to the Olympic motto and the audience accepts this perception without question. At the same time, however, the journalists and their editors are responding to a largely unconscious awareness that the audience is going to be more accepting of a conventional ideology (which disadvantages women) than of representations of women which challenge conventional

notions. Therefore, the audience is deeply complicit in the perpetuation of the ideology. By generating consent to the parameters of gender norms set up by the news media, the audiences are accepting the news media's "moral, political and cultural values" (Mayr 13) on gender relations.

### *Conclusion*

A critical discourse description and interpretation of the news discourse organized thematically around key categories of representation using Fairclough's convention shows that the descriptive language is ostensibly intended to draw attention to the athletes' achievements. However, a closer examination of the language reveals patterns of representation which are at once ideological and hierarchical.

The patterns of representation are ideological because they consistently normalize a difference in how the agency of men and women is accepted in the context of Olympic competition, with men's agency being strongly identified with victorious outcomes, and women's agency being deferred and dissociated from concept of victory. We may distinguish between the very different portrayals of the success of male and female athletes by noting the degree to which males can be shown to embody the victorious transcendence of a boundary, while females are to various degrees dissociated from the same activity, even in victory. The ideology thus revealed is also hierarchical, with male achievement privileged in the way situated in the audience's consciousness.

Moreover, the textual representations of female athletes reveal that although the discriminatory language can be found in all the descriptions of female athletes in various types of sports events, the discriminatory language concentrates most heavily in the representations of athletes in aquatic sports events which may be due to the relative predominance of Chinese athletes in these events in the Olympic Games over the past many years. Therefore, it shows that the more outstanding Chinese athletes' (both male and female) performance is in the aquatic sports events, the more recognition tends to be given to male athletes as by doing so, male athletes will be embodiments of excellence, as the best players in the best sports events, although in many occasions female athletes are outperforming males. The construction and maintenance of these ideologies corresponds to Gramsci's discussion of the consent form of hegemony, where a hierarchy is confirmed through the normalization of assumptions. Moreover, the study of the Chinese gender representation within CDA contributes to the understanding of how "ordinary news discourse" is ideological to an extent that most people do not perceive even in the context of the most basic reporting on subjects such as sports.

The imposition of boundaries on female athletes can also be evidenced by the visual representations in the news discourse through the rhetorical process which Kenneth Burke called "symbolic mergers", where related uses of language can be seen to cluster around an "ultimate term". The ways in which ostensibly neutral terms are drawn into the "orbit" of an ultimate term within the totality of the discourse can then be used to identify the attitude, identified here with consent hegemony, towards which the audience is, in Burke's terms,



“coached”. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will conduct a cluster analysis of how the visual portrayal of representative male and female athletes in the news discourse interacts with the textual in perpetuating an ideology of gender inequality.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL MATERIAL**

This chapter will continue to answer the first research question that I have been exploring in the previous chapter. While the previous chapter analyses the textual representations of male and female athletes by using Fairclough's CDA, this chapter examines the visual portrayal of representative male and female athletes by deploying Burke's cluster analysis.

According to Sturken and Cartwright, to "explore the meaning of images is to recognize that they are produced within dynamics of social power and ideology" (22). The critical perspective to the examination of the meanings of images reflects what Kellner calls the Critical Visual Literacy approach. A critical approach to visual images "enables one to situate images in social and political contexts and grasp their range of meanings and effects, and to criticize images that promote blameworthy phenomena such as sexism, racism, or homophobia" (Kellner 85-86). Moreover, it is not "a specific dogmatic perspective that is superior to all others, but as part and parcel of the enterprise of gaining skills and literacies to empower individuals in the rapidly proliferating image culture of the present" (Kellner 88). In other words, Critical Visual Literacy is open to a multi-perspective approach in exploring the meanings of images. Kellner's approach aligns well with the "guerilla tactics" (Japp 113) that associates with Kenneth Burke's methods of "outing" ideologies and motives. Consequently, in this study, I will use a rhetorical approach, represented by Kenneth Burke's cluster

analysis, in probing the symbolic dimension of images that portray male and female Olympians in the Chinese context.

Traditionally, cluster analysis is applied to the examination of patterns that reoccur in verbal texts. However, the repeated use of visual elements in images can also form clusters through which the media's gender attitudes can be identified. Just as the strongest vocabulary item will reveal a "terministic screen" (Burke "A Grammar" 59; also see Chapter 2) which prompts larger processes of selection and deflection so that more neutral terms come to be interpreted in reference to the "entelechiial/ultimate term" (Burke, "On Symbols" 71; also see Chapter 4), so a particularly strong image provides the key to understanding how we come to interpret less powerful images with reference to the powerful one.

Following Burke's method of conducting cluster analysis (see Chapter 4), I will first identify the key visual elements in the visual portrayal of male and female athletes. Then I will examine the clustered visual elements that are associated with the key visual elements. Subsequently, I will begin the analysis by pairing the symbolic meanings with which male and female athletes are associated. Subsequently, I will provide a rhetorical interpretation of the visual portrayal. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by pointing out the discriminatory nature of both the textual and the visual representations of the athletes and forecast the social and cultural conditions that determine the unequal depictions of gender relations in Chinese news discourse, as explored in Chapter 7.

### *Key Visual Elements*

As Burke proposes, the first step in cluster analysis is to identify the key terms (see Chapter 4). An examination of the images that portray male and female athletes shows that *hand gesture* and *facial expression* are the most frequently and intensely used categories of visual elements. Therefore, in the cluster analysis of the visual representations of male and female athletes, *hand gesture* and *facial expression* are identified as the key elements around which the various types of hand gestures (such as waving and clenching) and facial expressions (such as smiling and shedding tears) are clustered.

### *Clustered Visual Elements around Key Visual Elements*

The second step of cluster analysis is to examine the terms that are clustered around the key elements (see Chapter 4). In this section, I will identify the clustered visual elements that are associated with the two key visual elements (i.e. *hand gesture* and *facial expression*) in exploring how male and female athletes are portrayed on the basis of an ideology of gender inequality.

The identification of visual elements that are clustered around the key visual element *hand gesture* in portraying male athletes shows that the news discourse deploys the following clusters:

- returning the badminton/birdie
- using unrestrained hand gestures
- holding hurdle

- sprinkling water on face
- making relaxed explanatory hand gesture while chatting
- giving thumbs up
- demonstrating inviting-hand-gesture
- waving stars
- clenching fist
- pointing to sky for signaling success
- pointing at spectators for engaging their attention
- holding flying rings with two-arm handstand in the air
- waving to audiences with palm fully opened

In comparison, an examination of the visual elements that are clustered around the key visual element *hand gesture* in portraying female athletes demonstrate that the news discourse deploys the following clustered visual elements:

- covering mouth in controlling tears
- drying tears with tissues after losing game
- drying tears of excitement for success with one hand and holding bouquet with another
- making formal military salute using one hand and holding bouquet with another
- waving (weakly) to spectators
- holding gold medal tightly to chest
- holding gold medal close to face

- clapping hands with coach in celebrating achievement

An exploration of the visual elements that are associated with the key visual element *facial expression* in depicting male athletes shows that the news discourse employs the following clustered visual elements:

- focusing attentively on the direction where badminton/birdie is coming from
- looking frustrated
- looking relieved
- looking aggressive
- looking confident
- kissing hurdle
- smiling without restraint
- opening mouth widely due to exhaustion
- smiling with teeth fully exposed
- showing tightly closed mouth while looking straight at the front
- shouting for celebrating success
- looking attentively at the floor
- gritting teeth

In comparison, an examination of the visual elements that share an identical ideological meaning with the key visual element *facial expression* in portraying female athletes reveals that the news discourse deploys the following clustered visual elements:

- being acted upon by strong emotions in both success and loss

- being vulnerable to emotional upset
- showing tightly closed mouth
- showing lowered head
- giving ambiguous emotion (either weeping or smiling)
- greeting the spectators with a big smile
- looking straight ahead
- listening to male coach's instructions

To conclude, the visual elements that are associated with the two key visual elements *hand gesture* and *facial expression* in the representation of male and female athletes reveal that the news discourse deploys a variety types of clusters in depicting male and female athletes.

However, the “attitudes” (Burke, “A Rhetoric” 50; also see Chapter 2) that the clustered visual elements communicate in portraying female athletes are significantly different from those in males. While the clustered visual elements that represent male athletes affirm male athletes’ agency and competence in claiming success, those that portray females depict them on a footing which suggests passivity and withholds acknowledgement of competence.

To explore how the images in the news discourse acknowledge male competence while undermining females’, in the following sections, I will conduct a cluster analysis of the visual portrayal of male and female athletes by focusing on the *act-attitude* ratio as Burke proposed in his “pentad” (“A Grammar” xv; see Chapter 2; also see Foss “Rhetorical Criticism” 361) due to the fact that the clustered visual elements that surround *hand gesture* and *facial expression* naturally draw attention to the interaction of the action and the implied

agency behind it. Close examination of this ratio will allow for a reconstruction of the differing attitudes toward male and female agency normalized in the reportage because it is in attitude, as constrained by the act, that the rhetor, audience, and athletes are made consubstantial in the discourse of what acceptable female agency can be.

### *Analysis of the Clustered Visual Elements*

The ideological meanings shown from the analysis of the *act-attitude* ratio in the clustered visual elements surround the two key elements in images that depict male and female athletes can fall into different thematic categories. By using the themes as clusters, I will examine how the use of *act-attitude* ratio in the clustered visual elements convey an assumption that while male athletes represent toughness, females represent emotional vulnerability; while male athletes symbolize non-restraint, females symbolize restraint; and while male athletes are associated with dominance, females are associated with submission to authority.

### **Male Toughness versus Female Emotional Vulnerability**

The first type of gender ideology the *act-attitude ratio* the clustered visual elements communicate is that while male athletes are symbols of tough patriots making contributions to winning out of national pride, females are symbols of emotional vulnerability due to their tears shed in the fact of both success and failure. As a case in point, I will take the images in the following sections as examples.



*Depictions of male athletes*



China's badminton champion Lin Dan<sup>109</sup>

(Image 1)



China's badminton champion Lin Dan<sup>110</sup>

(Image 2)

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<sup>109</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c\\_131757695.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/03/c_131757695.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 3, 2012.

<sup>110</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c\\_131749012.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c_131749012.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on July 31, 2012.



China's Liu Xiang (Centre) in men's 110m hurdles heat fell down<sup>111</sup>

(Image 3)



China's Liu Xiang in men's 110m hurdles heat kisses a hurdle when he jumped to the destination after falling down<sup>112</sup>

(Image 4)

(Xinhuanet)

### *Depictions of female athletes*



Chinese diving champion Wu Minxia<sup>113</sup>

(Image 5)



China's shooting champion Du Li<sup>114</sup>

(Image 6)

(China Sports Daily)

<sup>111</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/07/c\\_131767959.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/07/c_131767959.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 7, 2012.

<sup>112</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/09/c\\_131773422.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/09/c_131773422.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 9, 2012.

<sup>113</sup>. See this image in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 7, 2012.

<sup>114</sup>. This image can be found in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 5, 2012.



China's women volleyball team member<sup>115</sup>  
Ma Yunwen weeps for a loss  
(Image 7)



China's butterfly stroke champion Jiao Liuyang<sup>116</sup>  
(Image 8)  
(*Heilongjiang Daily*)

The depictions of the *act* and the *attitude* of male and female athletes in the images above present us a stark contrast between the ideologies that the two pentadic elements communicate. To illustrate, I will employ the following table:

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<sup>115</sup>. This image can be found in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 9, 2012.

<sup>116</sup>. This image can be found in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 3, 2012.

Table 6.1

*Act-attitude* ratio in the perpetuation of “male toughness versus female emotional vulnerability”

C PE	G		
		Male athletes	Female athletes
Act		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focusing on the direction where badminton/birdie is coming from</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shedding tears and drying tears either with empty hand or with tissues (in occasions of both success and loss)</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Showing different facial expressions in competing</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Falling during men’s 110m hurdles heat</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kissing deeply the hurdle after losing the games</li> </ul>	
Attitude		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Proactiveness /undefeatedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reactiveness/defeatedness</li> </ul>

a. Note: G= Gender    C= Clusters    PE= Pentadic Elements

As Table 6.1 shows above, although the news discourse devotes space for portraying both male and female athletes’ *act* and *attitude*, the focuses differ. The depiction of male athletes’ *act* in the images focuses on the representation of the process of their competing in the arena, as illustrated most intensively through the “entelechial/ultimate term” (see Chapter 4) – Image 4 in which Liu Xiang insisted on jumping to the destination after he was injured. In comparison, the images that represent female athletes concentrate on portraying their weeping for both success and loss, as demonstrated through Image 5 in which Wu Minxia has apparently burst into tears (also see the contrast between Images 1– 4 versus Images 5 – 8).

Therefore, the ultimate terms in the portrayal of male and female athletes represent the most complete expression of the logic that male athletes are undefeatable in any circumstances whereas females are opposite.

In addition, as Table 6.1 demonstrates, the acts of male athletes' competing in the arena include more varieties than those of females (the only act of female athletes is weeping, for both success and loss, which differs from male athletes' multiple types of activities). When all the varieties uniformly portray how tough male athletes are in conquering challenges during competition, the audience will ultimately only remember the athletes' greatness and dedication to sports. By contrast, when there is a portrayal of the only one act that female athletes are pursuing (i.e. weeping, for both success and loss), what is left in the audiences' memory is only the vulnerability of female athletes and their strength in being defeated. Consequently, when the positive attitude towards male athletes and the negative attitudes towards females are put together, the negative becomes the attitude coached in the audience (cf. Burke, "On Symbols" 182). In other words, when women are portrayed in more intense emotional terms, tears are the only available option, so that strong responses to both victory and defeat look the same, and centre on the embodiment of vulnerability as the attitude "perfected" in female behaviour.

In *attitude*, the stark contrast with the meanings conveyed from the acts of the athletes in the clustered visual elements is due to the assumption that male athletes embody proactiveness/undefeatedness and females represent reactiveness/defeatedness. Moreover, the visual depictions of female athletes blur the distinction between the emotions associated with

victory and those associated with defeat. Consequently, emotion, rather than action or achievement, becomes the dominant context in which the act is taken to its entelechial completion.

### **Male Non-Restraint versus Female Restraint**

The second type of gender ideology that the *act-attitude* ratio in the clustered visual elements communicates is that male athletes are free to surpass emotional boundaries in the context of athletic achievement, whereas females are expected to respect boundaries of acceptable behaviour, which opens the issue of the extent to which self-expression is associated or disassociated with achievement. To illustrate, I will focus on the analysis of the following images:

#### *Depictions of male athletes*



Shared championships between China's swimmer Sun Yang (Right) and Korea's Park Tae-Hwan (Left)<sup>117</sup>  
(Image 1)



China's marathon champion Si Tianfeng<sup>118</sup>  
(Image 2)

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<sup>117</sup>. See this image in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>118</sup>. See this image in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 12, 2012.



China's fencing champion Lei Sheng<sup>119</sup>  
(Image 3)

*(China Sports Daily)*



Sun Yang (Right 2nd) of China wave to his parents at the awarding ceremony of men's 4x200m freestyle relay of swimming. Chinese swimmers won the bronze medal in this event  
(Image 4)<sup>120</sup>

*(Xinhuanet)*

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<sup>119</sup>. See this image in Section 1 in China Sports Daily Published on August 2, 2012.

<sup>120</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/01/c\\_131751802.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/01/c_131751802.htm) in Xinhuanet published on August 1, 2012.



*Depictions of female athletes*



China's diving champions of women's synchronized 3m springboard. Wu Minxia (Left), He Zi (Right)<sup>121</sup>

(Image 5)



China's diving champions of women's synchronized 3m springboard. He Zi (Left), Wu Minxia (Right)<sup>122</sup>

(Image 6)

(*China Sports Daily*)



China's women's 200 butterfly champion Jiao Liuyang waves to spectators at the awarding ceremony<sup>123</sup>

(Image 7)



China's cycling track silver medalist Guo Shuang waves to spectators at the awarding ceremony<sup>124</sup>

(Image 8)

(*Xinhuanet*)

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<sup>121</sup>. See this image in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>122</sup>. See this image in Section 4 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 31, 2012.

<sup>123</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/02/c\\_131754697.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/02/c_131754697.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 2, 2012.

<sup>124</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/04/c\\_131760226.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/04/c_131760226.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 4, 2012.



The depictions of the *acts* as embodied attitudes of and toward male and female athletes in the images above present us a significantly different scale of freedom that male and female athletes have. To demonstrate, I will deploy the following table for an illustration:

Table 6.2

*Act-attitude* ratio in the perpetuation of “male non-restraint versus female restraint”

C \ G PE		Male athletes	Female athletes
Act		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chatting happily with opponent on podium</li> <li>▪ Laughing</li> <li>▪ Making relaxed explanatory hand gesture in chatting</li> <li>▪ Competing</li> <li>▪ Sprinkling mineral water on face</li> <li>▪ Shouting with the whole body leaning back</li> <li>▪ Waving to the audience with palm fully opened</li> <li>▪ Smiling with teeth fully exposed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Waving to spectators on podium</li> <li>▪ Taking group pictures</li> <li>▪ Waving (weakly) to spectators</li> <li>▪ Showing lowered head</li> <li>▪ Showing restrained mouth</li> </ul>
	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Natural</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formal</li> </ul>

a. Note: G= Gender    C= Clusters    PE= Pentadic Elements

As Table 6.2 demonstrates above, although the news discourse provides space for portraying both male and female athletes' *acts* and *attitude*, the focuses differ. While male athletes are depicted as agents in whom the transgression of emotional boundaries in sports competition is made complete, as demonstrated through the “ultimate term” – Image 3 in which Lei Sheng is celebrating his championship with extremely non-restrained yelling and large-scale leaning-back, females are represented as inevitably acting within acceptable boundaries, illustrated from the quieter, friendly greetings of Jiao Liuyang to the audiences in Image 7 (also see the overall contrast between Images 1–4 versus Images 5–8). When the two images become the “entelechial images” in the portrayal of male and female athletes respectively in this category, all other images are gravitated to the perpetuation of such a gender ideology.

In *attitude*, the distinct ideological meanings communicated from the acts of the athletes in the clustered visual elements reveal the assumption that males are symbols of naturalness and females are of formality, as is shown from Sun and Park's relaxed camaraderie in Image 1 versus the more formal and restrained smile of Wu in Image 5 and He in Image 6 as well as Jiao in Image 7. Consequently, the *act-attitude* ratio as manifested in the clustered visual elements portrays male athletes as exceeding restraints of self-expression while portraying females as practising restraints.

### Male Dominance versus Female Submission to Authorities

The last type of gender ideology that the *act-attitude* ratio in the clustered visual elements expresses is that male athletes are embodiments of dominance, whereas females represent submission to authorities. As the ideology is found in the comparison between the nine existing images that depict male athletes and the only five that portray females, therefore, I will focus on the analysis of the total images that are available (see below).

#### *Depictions of male athletes*



China's swimmer champion: Sun Yang<sup>125</sup>

(Image 1)



China's badminton champion Lin Dan (Right)  
and Malaysia's Lee Chong Wei (Left)<sup>126</sup>

(Image 2)

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<sup>125</sup> See this image in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on July 30, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> See this image in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 7, 2012.



Chinese Male Ping-pong team with coach (Right 2nd)<sup>127</sup>  
(Image 3)

(*China Sports Daily*)



China's men's gymnastics team champion<sup>128</sup>  
(Image 4)



China's Ping-Pong champion Ma Long<sup>129</sup>  
(Image 5)

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<sup>127</sup>. See this image in Section 2 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 9, 2012.

<sup>128</sup>. See this image in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>129</sup>. See this image in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 9, 2012.



China's swimmer champion Sun Yang<sup>130</sup>  
(Image 6)



China's athlete of flying rings Guo Weiyang<sup>131</sup>  
(Image 7)  
(*Heilongjiang Daily*)



China's swimmer champion Sun Yang<sup>132</sup>  
(Image 8)



China's badminton champion Lin Dan<sup>133</sup>  
(Image 9)  
(*Xinhuanet*)

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<sup>130</sup>. See this image in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 6, 2012.

<sup>131</sup>. See this image in Section 8 in *Heilongjiang Daily* published on August 1, 2012.

<sup>132</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c\\_131749070.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-07/31/c_131749070.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on July 31, 2012.

<sup>133</sup>. See this image at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c\\_131762977.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/sports/2012-08/06/c_131762977.htm) in *Xinhuanet* published on August 6, 2012.

*Depictions of female athletes*



China's taekwondo champion Wu Jingyu and her coach<sup>134</sup>



China's women's singles badminton champion  
Li Xuerui<sup>135</sup>

(Image 10)



Chinese Women's volleyball team<sup>136</sup>

(Image 12)

(Image 11)



Chinese Women's volleyball team<sup>137</sup>

(Image 13)

<sup>134</sup>. See this image in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 10, 2012.

<sup>135</sup>. See this image in Section 1 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 5, 2012.

<sup>136</sup>. See this image in Section 3 in *China Sports Daily* published on August 4, 2012.

<sup>137</sup>. Ibid.



Chinese diving champion Wu Minxia<sup>138</sup>  
(Image 14)

*(China Sports Daily)*

The depictions of the *acts* and the *attitude* of male and female athletes in the images above reveal an ostensible contrast with the scale of agency that male and female athletes have in acknowledging success. For a detailed analysis, I will employ the following table:

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<sup>138</sup>. See Note 113.

Table 6.3

*Act-attitude* ratio in the perpetuation of “male dominance *versus* female submission to authority”

C PE	G		
		Male athletes	Female athletes
Act		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thumbing up</li> <li>▪ Demonstrating inviting-hand-gesture</li> <li>▪ Showing clenched fist(s)</li> <li>▪ Pointing to sky for signaling success</li> <li>▪ Waving stars</li> <li>▪ Shouting</li> <li>▪ Gritting teeth</li> <li>▪ Holding the flying rings firmly with two-arm handstand in the air and looking attentively at the floor</li> <li>▪ Pointing to spectators for engaging their attention</li> <li>▪ Looking consciously at camera while clenching fist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Waving (weakly) to spectators</li> <li>▪ Being lifted up by male coach</li> <li>▪ Opening mouth widely</li> <li>▪ Saluting to spectators and looking at front</li> <li>▪ Listening to male coach's instructions</li> <li>▪ Swarming male coach and clapping hands with coach in celebrating achievement</li> <li>▪ Being consoled by male coach while being emotional for success</li> </ul>
		Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assertiveness</li> <li>▪ Dependence</li> </ul>

a. Note: G= Gender    C= Clusters    PE= Pentadic Elements

As Table 6.3 illustrates above, although the news discourse provides space for portraying both male and female athletes' acts and attitude, the focuses differ. While the depiction of male athletes associates them with the embodiment of competition and victory, demonstrated through the “ultimate term” – Images 3 & 4 in which both the athletes and their coaches are collectively presenting gestures that signal supremacy and dominance, that of females consistently dissociates them from achievement, making them instead the embodiment of



some other value, shown through Images 10 & 14 in which it is the male coaches who are “supporting” the female athletes, both physically and mentally (also see the overall contrast between Images 1– 9 versus Images 10 – 14). Consequently, the emphasis put on representing male athletes’ celebrating and competing indicates that their success is achieved through their own effort, and thus it is eligible for them to celebrate it. By contrast, by neglecting to portray the process of female athletes’ competing but rather focusing instead on their celebrating on the podium deflects the audiences’ attention from the same amount of effort that the athletes have made for success. Therefore, female athletes’ competence in sports is undermined because we take the actual performance on faith, as an assumption, rather than being offered an image to support the celebration of the actual effort and achievement. Based on such an opposing gender ideology, all other images clustered in this category are pulled towards the perpetuation of such an ideology (Burke, “On Symbols” 233).

In *attitude*, the opposing ideological meanings shown from the acts of the athletes in clustered visual elements are realized in the perpetuation of the ideology that male athletes are symbols of assertiveness and females represent dependence. Based on this assumption, the newspapers select images that portray male athletes’ dominance in sports and assertiveness in claiming success (see Images 1 – 9), while images that depict female athletes’ successes as belonging to the authority, demonstrated in their military salute and in being lifted up by a coach – acts that indicate their dependence on authorities (see Images 10 – 14).

The images present acts as constrained by attitudes in which the “perfection” of male and female behaviours represent different and incompatible entelechies of achievement,

which in turn represent hierarchical assumptions in which male achievement is clearly privileged as a more complete or perfect manifestation of the Olympic ideal. This implicit hierarchy is significant to an understanding of the rhetoric of journalistic practice in these texts on two levels. First of all, it illustrates Burke's point, expressed in his "Definition of Man", about humans being "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy" ("Language" 15), so that we respond to differences in behaviour, and to the representation of those differences, by looking for/seeing hierarchical structures in them. As Burke puts it, "those 'Up' are guilty of not being 'Down,' those 'Down' are certainly guilty of not being 'up.'" ("Language" 15). Burke uses the concept of guilt to signal how an attitude is not simply an impression, but an expectation involving how those involved will act within the hierarchy.

It is within these attitudes, the expectations that they encode, and the extent to which all of those involved will conform to those expectations, that we can argue that in this rhetorical situation, the rhetor who positions the reportage according to expectations, the audience whose norms create a certain set of expectations to which the rhetor orients the message, and the athletes themselves whose self-presentation seeks to "live up to" the anticipated standards of behaviour on which the rhetor reports, can all be said to be "consubstantial", as Burke uses the term. This consubstantiality of attitude, rooted in shared hierarchical concepts of virtue, motivates and determines the actions of all three parties in the production of messages about the achievements of female Olympians.

### **Relations between Clustered Visual Elements**

A cluster analysis of the ideological meanings shown from the use of *act-attitude* ratio in each thematic category reveals that the news discourse employs significantly different, largely opposing clustered visual elements in depicting male and female athletes' performance. Moreover, when all the thematic categories that portray male athletes are linked together, we can find that the news discourse represents victorious male athletes as dominant, unconquerable, and supreme beings. In comparison, female athletes are represented in association with vulnerability, confinement, and submissiveness. At the same time, in the clusters, male agency is made consubstantial with Olympic excellence, while female athletes are dissociated from their own achievements, the agency for which is deferred or transferred elsewhere.

In the following section, I will evaluate, drawing on Burke's rhetorical theories rhetorical, on how the ideology of gender inequality is communicated through the rhetorical use of visual elements in the images.

#### *Rhetorical Interpretation of the Visual Representations*

The Burkean rhetorical concepts that the visual representations of male and female athletes manifest are "motive", "identification" and "persuasion", and "attitude".

Firstly, perpetuation of gender inequality is the "motive". As Burke states, motives can be found in the use of the "ultimate term" which subsumes all the other complex meanings associated with the use of many other terms (see Chapter 2). The analyses of the

*act-attitude* ratio in each category in the portrayal of male and female athletes reveals that regardless of the multiple meanings that the acts of the athletes express, there is always one “entelechial image” in which we can find the media’s differing attitudes towards male and female athletes’ agency. When the “ultimate image” conveys an affirmation of male agency while containing that of females as perceived by the audience, the rhetor identifies her audience with her gender motive.

Secondly, ambiguous portrayal prompts “identification” and “persuasion”. As Burke remarks, identification is a full display of how a rhetor employs forms of representation permeated with consciousness such as “speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea” (“A Rhetoric” 55; also see Chapter 2) in engaging the audiences’ interest with her own. Understood collectively as a rhetor, news media may be seen to deploy images that communicate strong ideological messages concerning representations of male and female athletes.

However, as Burke continues, “identification is compensatory to division” (“On Symbols” 182), and when they are “ambiguously [put] together ... [we] cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and we have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (“On Symbols” 184). In the images, female athletes are indeed celebrating their success; however, their success is portrayed through an emphasis on depicting their emotional vulnerability, restraint in public, as well as submission to authority. Consequently, when both compliment and undermining are put together, we cannot know whether the news discourse is praising or confining female athletes and their achievements are open to

audiences' interpretation. The ambiguity created between praise and containment requires the audience to complete the picture, by putting together the signals suggested by the coverage. Put differently, it is a working of *enthymeme* (see Chapter 2) because identification and persuasion only become complete when the audience provides the missing part themselves, which, in the context of this study, is the open interpretation of female athletes' competence on the part of the audiences.

Lastly, discriminatory gender attitude is the "incipient action". The different visual portrayal of male and female athletes is a manifestation of the different gender attitudes the news discourse practises towards male and female athletes. *Attitude*, as Burke defines it, is "an incipient act, a leaning or inclination" (Burke, "A Rhetoric" 50; also see Chapter 2) which "can be the *substitute* for an act, [and thus] it can likewise be the *first step towards* an act" (Burke, "A Grammar" 236; emphasis original). Throughout the news coverage, the audience's expectation regarding female athletes' behaviour is circumscribed by the clusters of the images that contain an impression of disempowerment. Therefore, the conspicuous visual presence of female athletes in the news discourse turns out to be a reflection of the "absence of woman as subject and her voice as discourse" (Cui xii). The incipient action that is fostered here involves a continued acceptance of and insistence on women playing certain prescribed roles that come from the rigid and selective interpretation of Confucian gender philosophy (see Chapter 7).

## *Conclusion*

The textual and the visual representations of male and female athletes in the news discourse “generates sexual difference in accordance with a patriarchal unconscious” (Cui 2004. xvii). Behind woman’s visibility in the newspapers, there lies a complex interaction between gender, power, and “the ambivalent possibility of woman as subject” (Cui 2004, xii). Therefore, while on the surface it seems that the news media are giving female athletes equal chances to be seen and to be heard in the news reportage, closer examination reveals that they are not given an equal representation regarding their athletic skills and performance.

As Fairclough argues, “no account of the processes of production and interpretation can be complete which ignores the way in which they are socially determined” (Fairclough, “Language” 24-25). A discriminatory gender ideology against women in Chinese news discourse has its ingrained social and cultural roots. Knowing the social and cultural conditions that determine representations of gender relations in Chinese society will help us better interpret why gender inequality is being perpetuated in modern Chinese society. Therefore, the following chapter will account for how Confucian gender philosophy, which fundamentally emphasizes harmony and complementarity between men and women, has been rigidly and selectively interpreted and thus resulted in the unequal representations of gender relations in modern Chinese society.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR THE UNEQUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER RELATIONS**

While the previous two chapters have explored how the news discourse communicates an affirmation of male athletes' agency in achieving success and a disassociation of females from the same success, this chapter will answer the second research question, which is "What are the social and cultural contexts for the perpetuation of a discriminatory gender ideology against female Chinese athletes in the news discourse?". Meanwhile, the previous two chapters have respectively conducted the first two steps of analysis of the news discourse. Consequently, this chapter will complete the last step of the CDA and the cluster analysis of the news discourse by exploring how gender inequality in Chinese society share a common social and cultural context.

To start with, I will provide an introduction to the characteristics of Chinese culture and its mainstream national ideology – Confucianism. Then I will expand on the Confucian conventions of gender relations and how they have been misinterpreted. Subsequently, I will demonstrate the influences of the hierarchical interpretation of Confucian gender conventions on both individuals (particularly women themselves) and the nation's perspective on gender, drawing on both philosophical and historical evidence. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by pointing out how the hierarchal interpretation of Confucian gender conventions constrains the portrayal of gender relations in modern Chinese news discourse.

### *Mainstream Chinese National Culture*

According to Scollon and Scollon, “[w]hen [language] is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways” (qtd. in Jin, “A Comparative Study” 525). Similarly, in addressing the issue of the perpetuation of gender discrimination in Chinese news discourse, one cannot ignore the social and cultural traditions that determine the definition of gender relations in Chinese society.

The major characteristics of Chinese culture, as Jin states, “can be briefly summarized as high context oriental culture” (“A Comparative Study” 524). “High-context culture”, as Hall explains, is “one in which people are deeply involved with each other” (qtd. in Kim *et al.* 509). Moreover, “[a]s a result of intimate relationships among people, a structure of social hierarchy exists, individual inner feelings are kept under strong self-control, and information is widely shared through simple messages with deep meaning” (Hall; qtd. in Kim *et al.* 509). Alternatively, in high-context culture, “the intimate human relationships and the well-structured social hierarchy and norms serve as a broad context in which human communication takes place” (Hall; Kim *et al.* 512). Accordingly, in a low-context culture such as North American culture, explicit explanation of background and rationale becomes important, because there is no expectation that a common code is in place which makes sense of everything. Therefore, the consistent perpetuation of gender inequality across the three news outlets as shown in the previous two chapters reflect certain key characteristics of the high-context Chinese culture.



In the high-context Chinese culture, Confucianism, more than any other belief system, is the dominant cultural ideology and philosophy (Rosenlee 2). In its thousands of years of development, “Confucianism [has] become the background cultural assumption – the most prominent intellectual tradition in Chinese history” (Rosenlee 2). In other words, Confucianism is the source of the ideological representations of gender relations in the news discourse.

According to Mou, “Han Confucianism, which became the foundation of later Confucianism, is [characterized by] its holistic view of human relationships, polity, and morality” (7). Moreover, Confucianism is “not one-dimensional but a system of all-round and multidimensional cultural complexes. Its cultural spirit is not still, but should be interpreted with the development of the times; its cultural essence should be sublimated” (Jin, “A Comparative Study” 524). As a part of the holistic and multidimensional cultural system, gender relation accordingly denotes a complementary, rather than an opposing, relation between men and women. Nevertheless, the complementary and fluid view of gender relations in Confucianism was evolved into one that denotes the hierarchical relations between men and women when popular understandings of Confucianism select aspects of those hierarchies and enforce them with an undue rigidity. The following section will expand on how Confucian gender philosophy has been rigidified and interpreted selectively in its thousands of years’ development

*Confucian Gender Philosophy and Popular Understandings of the Philosophy*

In the traditional Confucian classic *Yijing* (*The Classic of Changes*), philosophers use *yin-yang* (dark-bright) to “clearly represent two equal and mutually complementary opposites” (Lee 13) (see fig. 7.1 below).



Figure 7.1. The *yin-yang* relation. Source: Paul Downes, “Concentric and Diametric Structures in Yin/Yang and the Mandala Symbol: A New Wave of Eastern Frames for Psychology.” *Psychology and Developing Science* 23.1 (2011): 121-153. Web. 129.

*Yin-yang*, as Raphals explains, refers to the totality of the knowledge of the complementary, rather than to the opposing relationship between binary elements (160). To demonstrate, Raphals employs the following table:

Table 7.1

*Yin* and *Yang* as complementary poles

Knowledge about	Words for expressing that knowledge
heaven and earth	above and below
four seasons	yin and yang
human nature	men and women
birds and beasts	cock and hen (male and female)

Source: Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*

(Albany: State University of New York Press. 1998) 160. Print.

As Table 7.1 shows, in order to express any totality of the knowledge about the world, there must be a simultaneous coexistence of the two complementary things in the totality, regardless of which category they belong to. Similarly, to express the knowledge about “human nature” (see table 7.1), “men and women” must be co-present so that the knowledge of “human nature” will be complete. As Rosenlee argues, the “irreducible complementarity of *yin-yang* both in the cosmos and the human body in fact suggests a rather fluid view of sexual difference between the male and the female body and consequently seems to imply a more tolerant view of gender roles in the Chinese world” (6). Consequently, it is apparent that early Confucian philosophy of gender relations did not express a hierarchal gender relation which assumes that men are superior to women.

However, due to an arbitrary association of the two things in a category with hierarchies (Raphals 159), *yin* and *yang* are exploited to refer to the opposing relations

between two things in the same category, which contradicts to their original meanings. As an illustration, Raphals deploys the following table:

Table 7.2

*Yin and Yang* in hierarchical analogies

Superior Term	Knowledge about	Inferior Term
above	spatial relationship	Below
heaven		Earth
yang	four seasons	Yin
men	human nature [ <i>sic</i> ]	women
cock	birds and beasts	Hen

Source: Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*

(Albany: State University of New York Press. 1998) 150. Print.

As Table 7.2 illustrates above, while “above”, “heaven”, “yang”, “men”, and “cock” are equated with superiority, “below”, “earth”, “yin”, “women”, and “hen” are associated with inferiority. Based on the hierarchical interpretation of gender relationships in the *yin-yang* complementary scheme, a woman in traditional Chinese society is considered only as a woman when she manifests a set variety of virtues. Firstly, she needs to practise the “Three obediences and the four virtues”. As Andors explains, the “three obediences” refer to the imperative that “in youth a girl was obedient to the wishes of her father; when married, to her husband; and in widowhood, to her son”, while the “four virtues” include “the propriety in

behavior, speech, demeanor, and employment” (13). Secondly, she should be a “good daughter, wife, and mother”, which insists that “a ‘proper woman’ must also conform to the normative representation of familial, kinship roles assigned to a woman as daughter, wife, and mother” (Rosenlee 47). Lastly, she has to follow the “Three cultural imperatives”, which are “filiality, patrilineality, and ancestor worship” (Rosenlee 123). In filiality, a woman is expected to have a male heir as an expression of her filiality to parents (or ancestors); in patrilineality, when a man is over forty but does not have a male heir, he can have a concubine for carrying on the family line; in ancestor worship, it is required that only male descendants can conduct rituals in remembering ancestors (Rosenlee 123). Figure 7.2 below illustrates the coexistence of the three main gender conventions that a woman in Confucianism is expected to follow.

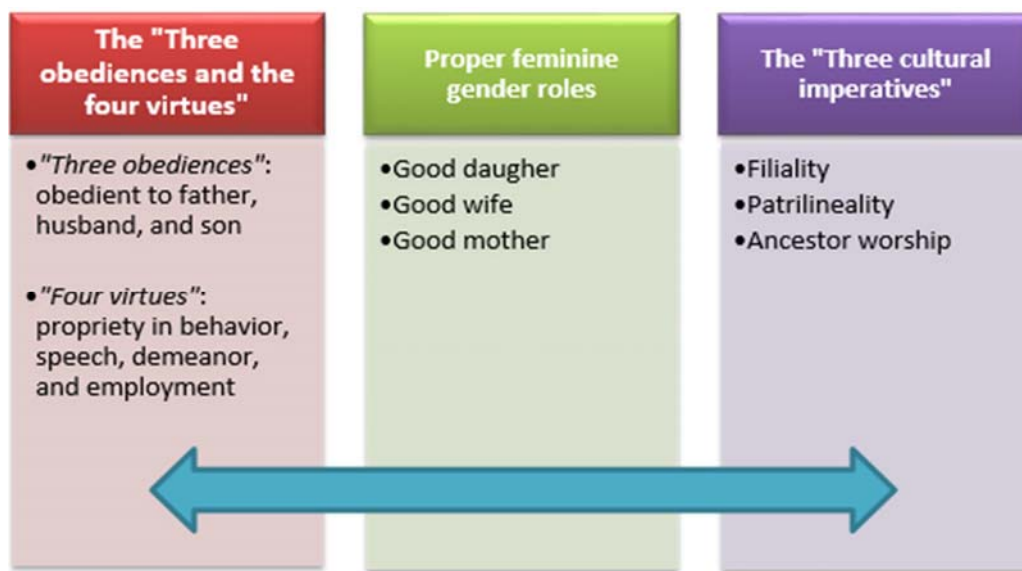


Figure 7.2. The coexistence of the Confucian gender expectations of a woman

By contrast, a man in ancient Chinese society was not bound to all these constraints that were imposed on women. Being a man, he has the right to divorce his wife, to take on concubines, to work outside of the home, to be talented, and to demand bound feet of the wife (Gao, “Women” 114-125). As a result, within the hierarchical interpretations of Confucian gender relations, women are considered as possessions of men, who do not have control over their own destiny.

Similar to the arbitrary association of *yin* and *yang* with inferiority and superiority, respectively, the *nei-wai* (in-out) binary is another gender convention that is employed to the division of men and women into two opposing categories. According to Rosenlee, “[t]he term *nei-wai* in its early usage is nongender [*sic*] specific, primarily signifying the spatial boundary between the orderly imperial court and the chaotic outside world. And that boundary is eventually a boundary between what is civil and what is barbaric” (72). However, “it is from the early usage of *nei-wai* as a symbolic boundary between civility and barbarism that the later use of the *nei-wai* derives its authority in defining proper gender distinction” (Rosenlee 72). The *nei-wai* gender distinction principle “defines the propriety of two gender spheres and the normative gender division of labor” (Rosenlee 93). According to this principle, men and women have their own domains in which to act: while women should act in *nei* (in), men should act in *wai* (out), and they are not permitted to traverse the other’s space (Rosenlee 69). To illustrate, women are supposed to conduct domestic skills and household management, while men are given more opportunities and privileges to act outside of the familial realm where they can access to knowledge, literature, culture, and

remembrance (Rosenlee 94). The association of men with *wai* and women with *nei* is a “marker of gender distinction” and a definition of “what is central and what is peripheral, or fundamental and derivative” (Rosenlee 70).

In spite of the fact that men and women are not allowed to cross the gender boundaries within the *nei-wai* framework, there is no shortage of women in Chinese history who have proved that they can traverse into man’s sphere of *wai* and perform better than men. A case in point is Ban Zhao (also spelt as *Pan Chao*, roughly from 45 A. D. – 116 A. D.) who was a woman historian in Han China and who was both a filial daughter and a chaste widow in her life. Despite how difficult her life was in the patriarchal society, her achievement in both literature and politics has proved that women – who are expected to act in the familial realm – can equally compete with men in man’s sphere of *wai* (Rosenlee 116). Therefore, it reveals that the relation between *nei* and *wai* is subject to change with context.

Likewise, in this research, it is not rare that female athletes in a variety of sports events have demonstrated equally remarkable or even better performance than males in the Olympic Games – a formal and public occasion that can be considered as the sphere of *wai*, according to the distinction in Confucian traditions. However, although the news discourse has devoted some space to complimenting female athletes on their performance, a significant amount of text was devoted to the portrayal of the traditional domestic roles such as caring mothers, virtuous wives, as well as filial daughters, with which female athletes are associated. In addition, even when the news discourse praises female athletes’ performance, male athletes are used as a standard against which females’ performance is being evaluated, which

reveals a containment of women in the sphere of *wai* and the predominance of the patriarchal gender ideology.

The hierarchical interpretation of the complementary Confucian gender relations in Chinese society has resulted in a wide-scale of perpetuation of gender inequality in Chinese society in both individual and national levels. By using both philosophical and historical evidence, the following section will explore how individuals (particularly women themselves) and the nation are complicit in reinforcing the ideology of gender inequality.

#### *Influences of the Hierarchical Interpretation of Confucian Gender Philosophy*

The influence of the hierarchical interpretation of the Confucian gender relations on an individual level lies primarily in the reinforcement of women's own consciousness of their disadvantaged gender identity. With regard to the influence on a national level, even in a period in modern China when there was an effort made consciously to oppose gender inequality, as manifested in the propaganda posters in Maoist-era China, the hierarchal gender relation still reflects itself in the posters.

#### **On Women's Own Interpretation of Their Gender Identity**

As elaborated upon in the earlier section, women in feudal Chinese society are expected to practise the "Three obediences and the four virtues", the "Three cultural imperatives", and the virtue of being a "good daughter, wife, and mother". However, women in modern Chinese society have not gone beyond the ideological constraints of the rigidified



Confucian gender conventions and they may even act as participants in the perpetuation of the ideology of gender inequality, either consciously or unconsciously. As Evans remarks, “[w]hether or not ... [women] consciously acknowledge the dominant gender categories ... [established through] discourses, they also participate in reproducing them by making representations and self-representations – both consciously and unconsciously – with reference to them” (19). Similarly, as Rosenlee argues, “the continuation of a ‘sexist’ practice is sanctioned by both men and women, despite its general negative effect on and implications for women” (122). Alternatively, women are not only passive victims of the hierarchical gender order, but also active participants in solidifying the order.

Consequently, “women who have internalized ideological assumptions of patriarchy are equally victimizers of other women” and “women who are unconscious victims of patriarchal culture invariably become accomplices in the oppression of other women” (Barlow, “Gender Politics” 281). In this research, despite the fact that news media in China depict women on a discriminatory basis, female athletes’ self-perpetuation of the discrimination gender ideology against themselves constitutes another reason for the unequal portrayal of female athletes in the news discourse.

The Chinese experience corresponds to de Beauvoir’s observation as articulated in her work *The Second Sex*. According to de Beauvoir, the oppressor-oppressed role a woman is playing in her seeking of gender identity sanctions “herself simultaneously as *self* and as *other*, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences” (675). The consequences are due to how, when a woman “makes weapons at once of her weakness and of her strength, it is not a

matter of designing calculation: she seeks salvation spontaneously in the way that has been imposed on her, that of passivity, at the same time when she is actively demanding her sovereignty” (de Beauvoir 675). Therefore, in playing simultaneously the roles of both self and other, “the traditional woman [becomes] a bamboozled conscious being and a practitioner of bamboozlement; she attempts to disguise her dependence from herself, which is a way of consenting to it” (de Beauvoir 667). As the analyses of the news material have demonstrated, even some female athletes who are Olympic champions regard male athletes’ performance as standards and keep comparing their own performance against males’ (see Chapter 5). By self-undermining, female athletes respond to the media’s perpetuation of the discriminatory gender ideology against them, which will reinforce the audiences’ perception of female subordination in sports as normal.

As de Beauvoir also observes, being “[b]rought up in an atmosphere of respect for male superiority, she may still feel that it is for man to occupy the first place; sometimes she fears that in claiming it she would ruin her [image as a *woman*]” (654; emphasis added). The conflict between “the desire to assert herself and that for self-effacement” when she has internalized from childhood the superiority of men and inferiority of women makes her “torn and divided” (de Beauvoir 654). Moreover, “[b]y resigning herself to this inequality, she enhances it; she is persuaded that her chances of success can lie only in her patience and application; she resolves to be as economical as possible of her time and strength – surely a very bad plan” (de Beauvoir 658-659). To apply de Beauvoir’s observation to the context of female representations in Chinese news media, female athletes need to recognize that their

self-confining behaviours are in fact further entrenching gender inequality in which they are the victims.

The influence of the hierarchical interpretation of Confucian gender relations on public perceptions of gender relations in China is so powerful that even the conscious promotion of gender equality in a period in modern Chinese history still reveal a perpetuation of gender inequality. An example is the ambiguous representations of women in the ubiquitous propaganda posters in the Maoist-era China between the 1950s and the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. The examination of the ideological influence of the propaganda posters are important not only in terms of illustrating the influence of the rigid interpretations of Confucian gender philosophy in places where we might not traditionally look for it, but in what the propaganda posters have to tell us about “idealized” images of women. Consequently, I will now demonstrate how gender relations were represented in propaganda posters during the Maoist-era China.

### **On the Portrayal of Gender Relations in National Propaganda Posters**

After 1949, in order to abolish the Confucian moral ideals that constrain women, the P.R.C led by Mao Zedong had employed a variety of means to promote gender equality. For instance, Mao proposed the famous motto that women “hold up half the sky”.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, emulating Soviet media propaganda, particularly its representation of Soviet women as “scientists, doctors, engineers, journalists or even truck drivers and construction workers”

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<sup>139</sup>. See Note 3.

(Hardwick, “Reviewing the Changing Situation of Women in Russian Society”), the P.R.C devoted a special column in the magazine *New Chinese Women* to the introduction of “Soviet women in all walks of life”, which has “provided a window through which the new image of Soviet women appeared” (Dong 35) in Marxist China.

However, what women were promised in the Maoist-era China did not fully come true. The evidence can be found in the biased portrayal of women in propaganda posters where, while there seems to be an overt rejection of the Confucian gender conventions, there is still a subtle discrimination against women. In the Maoist-era China, women were being greatly encouraged to participate in the construction of the socialist Chinese society in different areas and it seems that they were given more opportunities to pursue careers outside of the domestic domains, such as being train conductors (Wolf 284; see APPENDIX A), motor mechanics (Wolf 284; see APPENDIX A), agricultural machinery technicians (Cushing and Tompkins 73; see APPENDIX A), or electric welders (Landsberger and van Der Heijden 61; see APPENDIX A), and the Iron Girl models referred to in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, the images that portray women continue reinforcing the traditional Confucian moral values women are expected to demonstrate. Examples can be found in propaganda posters that offer an idealized portrayal of women in Mao’s era in Wolf’s (2008) *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From the Collection of Michael Wolf*, Landsberger and van Der Heijden’s (2009) *Chinese Posters*, as well as Cushing and Tompkins’s (2007) *Chinese Posters: Art from Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*.

A close examination of the posters collected in the above three works reveals that Chinese women are frequently modeled as (see APPENDIX B):

- those who act at home
- those who manage the kitchen
- those whose jobs are taking care of babies
- those who are tied to farming
- those who care about their appearance
- those who weave
- those who deal with diverse domestic tasks

The association of women with the various domestic activities in the propaganda posters are embodiments of the *nei-wai* (in-out) division of labour which expects women to act in *nei* (in) to practise the “Three obediences and the four virtues”, the “Three cultural imperatives”, and the virtue of being a “good mother and wife”. Accordingly, the depictions of women in the propaganda posters in the Maoist era reveal that although women were being allowed and even encouraged to work outside of home, they were simultaneously expected to devote time to domestic domains such as kitchens, farms, and take up responsibilities of child care. Therefore, along with the freedom that women had gained in working outside of home and with pursuing non-traditional career paths, there was a subtle implication that domestic domains were still women’s domains.

The emphasis put on portraying women in playing domestic roles, without a simultaneous depiction of men carrying out domestic duties, points to the double standard by

which “liberated” women were expected to excel in multiple spheres whereas men were not, a double standard which is carried over into the discourse of reporting on female Olympians. Moreover, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, in the Maoist-era China, although women had been role models in many non-traditional jobs such as the brigade or oil field, their physical constraints were not considered and they consequently suffered from a variety of sicknesses, which is a manifestation of the dominance of a male standard in the *wai* (out).

Mao Zedong once said, “Time has changed, what men can do women can do, too”,<sup>140</sup> but he significantly did not say that men should step up and take on traditional women’s domestic roles. However, although time has changed, and female athletes are equally participating in the Olympic Games and winning awards, news media in China still portray them on a discriminatory basis. As Rajan remarks, “there is no defined basis to assessing success; just as the fact of being female and in trouble marks out a victim’s tale as newsworthy in particular ways, so does a success tale qualify for being so, simply because the achiever is female” (118). Therefore, any evaluation of female athletes’ success are made in relation to their female gender identity. Consequently, although times have changed, and Chinese women have truly experienced the betterment brought by the development of Chinese society, the discriminatory gender attitude towards them still shuts them out of the stage where they can equally display their potential on the same scale as men do.

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<sup>140</sup> The original Chinese version of Mao Zedong’s comment on women’s capability is “时代不同了，男女都一样。男同志能办到的事情，女同志也能办得到”。Mao put forward this comment on women during his swim in Ming Tombs Reservoir, which was published later on the Chinese newspaper *People’s Daily* on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1965. To access to this quote, see the issue of *People’s Daily* published on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/99013/99043/6188330.html>.

### *Olympics as a Form of Reinforcing National Gender Identity*

As argued earlier, Confucian gender relation in its original form was about the complementary and fluid relation between men and women. Similarly, “Olympism is [also] a fluid philosophical perspective”, which “emphasizes the value of ‘fair play’ as a key dimension of the Olympics, along with such concepts as ‘non-discrimination’ and ‘human dignity’” (Miah and García 33). However, the biased portrayal of female accomplishment in the news discourse contradicts both the Confucian gender philosophy which emphasises harmony and the spirit of Olympism at the same time by constructing a hierarchical interpretation of male and female achievements in the Olympics.

According to Miah and García, “[t]he Olympic Games is a project of identity formation, contestation and consolidation. In other words, it can give rise to new ideas about a population’s identity, serve to challenge established ideas, or reinforce clichés and stereotypes” (29). Given that the Olympics is an outlet for displays of patriotism and/or nationalism, it is unsurprising that news discourse is motivated by a desire to uphold traditional Chinese values. Accordingly, the reportage will seek to stress accomplished female athletes as exemplary Chinese women. To be representative of Chinese ideals, female athletes are depicted in terms that journalist, audience, and athlete alike associate with typical virtues. Moreover, the dissociation of female accomplishments from the Olympic values, i.e. “excellence”, “respect”, and “friendship” (Maass 30), and association of female achievements with the traditional domestic roles are reinforcements of the Confucian clichés and stereotypes on gender relations. Therefore, the more a woman achieves, the more effort is put

into stressing her traditional virtues, which puts the discourse at odds with the Olympic ideal of breaking, rather than observing, boundaries.

The biased depiction of female Olympians' accomplishments in the news media thus forms a tension between the Confucian gender philosophy and how it is being "twisted" in the media coverage of the women. While the journalist is celebrating female athletes' achievements, there is also a simultaneous restraint of female athletes from breaking physical and social boundaries in the arena in order to meet the traditional gender values. In other words, although female Olympians are the best woman role models in sports, they are still considered as less competent than males. Even when they have outperformed males, their success will forever be less significant than males'. Consequently, female players are not expected to exceed boundaries and they are confined to their own area of excellence, provided that it does not supercede that of men, in a reflection of what Confucian gender values expect a woman to do.

As Miah and García state, "a nation can deliberately associate itself with certain social values that it may wish to champion, in order to make a statement about its national values" (32). The celebration of female Olympians' success within the confines of the hierarchical interpretations of Confucian gender conventions in the news discourse reveals the national value of gender relations in the Chinese culture: men are to excel in *wai*, women in *nei*.



## *Conclusion*

This chapter explored the second research question, reiterated as the social and cultural contexts that shape the unequal representations of female athletes in Chinese news discourse. Meanwhile, this chapter also carried out the last step of CDA and cluster analyses of the news discourse. Overall, this chapter deals specifically with how the rigid and selective interpretations of Confucian gender philosophy in Chinese society has influenced modern textual and visual depictions of gender relations. As Kim *et al.* remark, “the social structure or hierarchy of a culture over a long period of time has a significant impact on ... the current state” (509). However, “being determined by social structures, discourse has effects upon social structures and contributes to the achievement *of* social continuity or social change” (Fairclough, “Language” 37; emphasis original). Therefore, in the last chapter of this research, I will explore how to advance a change in the discriminatory representation of female athletes in Chinese news discourse so as to establish an equal gender relation in the field of sports in China.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CHANGING NEWS MEDIA, CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS IN CHINA**

This final chapter will answer the last research question, i.e. “What kinds of research are necessary to facilitate a better awareness among news producers, audiences, and of female athletes themselves, to encourage resistance to discriminatory ideologies?” To answer this question, I argue that changes in the unequal portrayal of gender relations in news media in China can only occur when news media, audiences, and female athletes themselves recognize and address the extent to which they are constrained by the ideology of gender inequality in their daily life. The dissertation concludes with suggestions for further research, and expresses optimism that raising consciousness of key problems in the media’s representation of women will advance the process of achieving gender equality in Chinese society.

#### *Approaches to Facilitating a Change in the News Discourse*

According to van Dijk, news discourse “has its particular structure” (“News” 2) where “dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text ... that appear ‘natural’ and quite ‘acceptable’” (van Dijk, “Principles” 302). As demonstrated in the analyses, the news discourse compliments overtly female athletes on their performance, which impresses the audiences with the ostensible objectivity in the reportage. However, the

underlying messages conveyed from the use of different verbal and non-verbal features reveals an essentialist gender ideology motivated by an attitude that assumes that female athletes by nature have less agency in claiming success than males due to their female gender identity.

Therefore, the first approach to bring a change in the unequal representations of female athletes lies in sportswriters.

### **News Media: Employing Equal Perspectives in Reporting, Changing Structures of Decision-making Power in News Institutions**

As de Beauvoir famously states, “[o]ne is not born, but rather *becomes*, a woman” (273; emphasis added). As an alternative, gender identity is not natural; it is “produced and reproduced through language and social practices [that] insert bodies into social and political processes” (Robert 488). Due to the naturalized assumption of the gender roles women are expected to play, sportswriters “[make] each woman appear even more feminine, although success on the court requires the strength, agility, and fitness level of an elite athlete” (Fuller 177). Moreover, “sportswriters ... may have had the greatest intent, [through] the use of more feature-style news articles, and the use of gendered language [to reduce women’s sports events] to just another thing men can do better” (Fuller 183). Since it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which there was a deliberate consciousness of disadvantaging women in the media given the anonymous character of the journalists, it is more productive to talk about the ideology/motivation the reportage communicates.

Based on the analyses of the news discourse in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I argue that any perspective that sportswriters draw upon in representing male and female athletes should be balanced. The unequal descriptions of male and female athletes are a direct result of the distinct perspectives that sportswriters deploy in portraying the athletes, which automatically forms a stereotype in the audiences' perception of what males represent and what females embody. Moreover, even when sportswriters employ the same perspective in depicting male and female athletes, the tone/attitude should be equally complimentary or equally negative rather than being biased.

As argued in Chapter 2, feminism does not mean that both men and women should engage in pursuing the same activities, but that both men and women's competence and potentials should be given equal acknowledgement and be assessed according to their own realities. As Fuller states:

It is difficult to imagine that in the ... new century, female players are still struggling for equitable coverage in space and prominence on the sports pages and for reportage that summarizes the highlights of a match without reducing each player to a status of inferiority via gendered and sexualized rhetoric. (183)

Put differently, if an essentialist gender ideology keeps being deployed in the news coverage of female athletes (and their performance), all the efforts that the athletes have made for making contributions to their countries will all be reduced to a struggle for an equal representation in the news reportage. Therefore, news media in China need to create a discursive and rhetorical space that allows for the equal portrayal of male and female athletes.

Moreover, as demonstrated at the beginning of this study (see Chapter 1), there is a far higher proportion of males than females in Chinese news institutions who have decision-making powers, which may account for the dominance of the patriarchal gender order in Chinese news institutions. As Barlow argues, when men are in the positions of power, “[their] texts frequently assume a male reader and manipulate the reader into adopting male values” (“Gender Politics” 82). By the same token, when men take up more of the highest executive positions in news institutions, the news contents will tend to reflect a patriarchal ideology which will result in women’s voices being barely heard. Therefore, the involvement of more women who have a strong awareness of gender equality in the decision-making positions in news institutions will provide a material condition for the equal representations of female athletes in the news discourse. When news discourse routinely depicts female athletes in terms which place the same value on their achievements as is the case for males, the promotion of ideologies of gender equality in Chinese society will become a more realistic objective.

While news media are making efforts to change their unequal representations of gender relations, audiences are an indispensable part of this process. In the following section, I will argue how the audience’s recognition of the exigence of gender inequality perpetuated in the media and generating debates on media literacy will be another approach that can help to facilitate the achievement of an equal portrayal of gender relations in Chinese news media.

## **Audiences: Recognizing the Exigence of Gender Inequality, Generating Debates on Media Literacy**

While the media in mainland China has been increasingly given more freedom in reporting since the advent of the open-door policy in 1980s, with the effect that Chinese audiences have been better informed of the news around the globe, the contents of media coverage do not always reflect reality (Shirk 2). On the contrary, the volume and consistency of the coverage induces audiences to believe what the news media reports to them.

As the analyses have shown, the discriminatory attitudes toward female athletes pervade the news reportage. However, audiences can help to mitigate the situation by employing a variety of approaches. To use McDonagh and Pappano's recommendations, the audience can employ a four-stage process of challenging sex segregation in the news representation of female athletes:

The first stage ... requires challenging the initial stage of prohibiting women from participating in academic or sports activities in the first place. The second stage allows women to participate in academic or sports activities, but only on a coercive sex-segregated basis. The third stage allows women to participate in academic and sports programs on a sex-integrated basis. And the fourth stage permits women to choose whether they prefer a sex-integrated or sex-segregated context for their academic or sports activities, that is, voluntary sex segregation.

(34)

The approaches above require an active dialogue between the audience and news media. On one hand, the audience should actively recognize the “exigence” (Bitzer 6) of gender inequality as perpetuated in news discourse and improve their awareness of the extent to which gender ideologies are normalized in the news discourse, and generate debates on the discriminatory portrayal of women in news media through both verbal and non-verbal means; on the other hand, news media needs to provide sources for the audience to participate in voicing their opinions on media literacy with regard to the representations of female athlete’s success.

Despite the fact that news media and audiences’ efforts can contribute to the change in the biased representations of female athletes in the news discourse, their efforts are the external forces, which may not be fundamental if female athletes themselves keep participating in the perpetuation of gender discrimination. Consequently, the last approach to facilitate a change in the unequal depictions of female athletes is for female athletes themselves to recognize the need to improve their awareness of self-perpetuating gender inequality.

### **Female Athletes: Improving the Awareness of Self-perpetuating Gender Inequality**

As the analyses have shown in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, female athletes can be active participants in discriminating against themselves even though in many occasions they have outperformed male athletes in the Olympic Games. For instance, in the textual representations of female athletes in *Xinhuanet*, we observed how Ye Shiwen, after winning

the championship for the 400 Individual Medley, belittled her own achievement in ways which valorized the male American swimmer Lochte at her own expense (see Chapter 5). Similarly, in the visual representations of female athletes, there are a variety of images in which the athletes are variously emotional or restrained in expressing either their excitement for accomplishment or sadness for loss, although sadness in defeat is framed as a more “appropriate” emotional response for women than exuberance in victory (see Chapter 6). Female athletes’ response to their own achievements corresponds to Barlow’s remark that “[w]omen have been routinely trained to read ‘like men’ and to disregard the ambivalences that that created within them” (“Gender Politics” 82). Therefore, female athletes need to be encouraged to talk about their performance and the reality of competition. To do so, the roles of family, community, and government cannot be ignored in providing support for female athletes to change their ingrained view of their gender roles in sports.

As McDonagh and Pappano argue, “[t]he family, the community, and government must press girls to explore nontraditional [*sic*] sports. We need role models” (McDonagh and Pappano 260). Specifically, there should be “a new way of thinking and an active effort by parents and youth sports leaders [and] [i]t is critical we get out of the gender role habits that dominate in sports and the rest of life” (259). Moreover, the nation should “recognize now that women can and should have educational opportunities equal with men [which will], in turn, serves as a foundation for equal employment opportunities” (McDonagh and Pappano 259). As a nation, “we want women to enter nontraditional [*sic*] educational and employment



fields, through government and foundation-sponsored programs aimed at encouraging women to enter such fields as math, science, and engineering” (McDonagh and Pappano 259-260).

As the founding father of modern Olympics Pierre de Coubertin says, the vision of Olympism “involve[s] a life of Olympic education, which would foster the complete human and would in turn translate into a better world” (Miah and García 10). With the joint effort from news media, audiences, and female athletes themselves, together with the support from family, community, and government, female Olympians will help to construct a better world where gender will become less influential as a factor in defining success.

To conclude, the whole question of consciousness is a very difficult thing to change, especially given that Confucianism has been inseparable from interpretations of gender relations in China for millennia. Therefore, there needs to be a critical dialogue on the hierarchical dimensions of the Confucian influence, and the ways that those assumptions are unthinkingly reproduced in normative discourses. Before concluding this study, I will propose areas that feminist scholars may research into in future.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

This study has shown that even when female Olympians have outperformed males, their success is consistently considered and portrayed to be less than males’. In other words, female players are expected to succeed without obviously exceeding, or transgressing, boundaries. As a consequence, they are confined to their own area of excellence, but not of men’s, which is a reflection of the Confucian gender division of labour. In addition, this

research has also demonstrated that feminist CDA and feminist rhetorical criticism can complement each other in exploring the issue of gender inequality, which has extended the theoretical and methodological scope of feminist research in both of the two fields of study. However, there is still room for future research.

One area may be the need for CDA and rhetorical assessment of news representations of gender relations in the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) in China such as Hong Kong and Macau since this study draws only upon mainland Chinese news context. Although the mainland and the SARs share similarities regarding cultural values (i.e. Confucianism), they differ significantly in political system and economic development, which will be potential factors that affect the construction of gender relations in their news media. Therefore, to conduct research on how news discourse in the SARs depicts gender relations, it will provide opportunities for both mainland China and the SARs to borrow experiences from each other in advancing gender equality

The other area may be the need for CDA and rhetorical assessment of popular feminist-oriented texts by Chinese women to further examine the extent to which even resistance to traditional gender prejudice carries the language of tradition with it. These texts could be written either in Chinese or in other languages, such as Jung Chang's (1992) *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* and Xinran Xue's (2002) *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*. Therefore, further interdisciplinary studies from the perspective of CDA that explore the translation and reception of global feminist thought in modern China using

rhetorical theory and theories from other areas of study is another avenue for future research into the ideological challenges facing the feminist tradition.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing upon Norman Fairclough's CDA method and Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis, this study has shown that representations of male and female athletes in representative Chinese newspapers consistently undermine female athletes' agency in asserting success by constantly associating them with traditional Confucian feminine gender roles, while affirming male agency and competence in acknowledging achievements. The representations of gender relations in the news discourse not only reflect the discriminatory gender ideology but actively maintain and extend it.

As Kimmel argues, "gender is not a property of individuals"; instead, it is "a set of relationships produced in our social interactions with one another" (409). Similarly, female gender does not determine that female athletes are less competent than males in sports; rather, it is the continuous association of female athletes with traditional Confucian gender values that make their extraordinary achievements seem to be less significant than those of males. When our daily exchanges of information and news remain hobbled by ideologies that we may believe we have left behind, it means that we are consenting to the "common sense" (Gramsci, "Selections" 12) given in the news. When we do not notice the ideologies, we are being "coached" (Burke, "Attitudes" 322) to embrace attitudes that we might not consciously or rationally embrace.

The crisis of consciousness that this research points to is the sheer difficulty of creating a space for fair assessment of female achievement. The single most important step to which this research can make a contribution is to make people aware of the problem and thus establish a body of critical material that shows how entrenched and widespread the discriminatory ideologies are. Developing a tradition of critical thinking on media literacy with regard to the influence of traditional ideology on modern expressions of gender relations could be depicted as the proper function of modern education. As Hill argues, “[s]o far, our educational system has failed to take seriously and to adequately respond to the fact that so much of [the] information [that students are exposed to daily] is in visual form” (Hill 107). Therefore, “a major goal of the educational system is to help students develop the abilities necessary to comprehend, interpret, and critically respond to the textual forms that they will encounter as members of the culture” (108).

However, nothing will happen if no one knows that there is an exigence. For that reason, it is important not to skip over the important task of identifying the exigence in the pursuit of calling for and ultimately designing specific policy or procedural changes which can only be the outcome of a complex administrative and educational process after the exigence has been widely recognized. Therefore, more critical research into reporting, advertising, and popular culture is needed.

As Karl Marx (1845) stated in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, “[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.”<sup>141</sup> This

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<sup>141</sup>. These words are also inscribed upon his tomb in Highgate Cemetery in London, United Kingdom. See fig. 8.1.

study criticizes the perpetuation of the ideology that “THE LACK OF TALENT IS A VIRTUE IN A WOMAN”, as the title of this dissertation manifests. At the end of this research, I want to propose that “THE LACK OF RECOGNITION OF WOMEN’S TALENT IS A VICE IN HUMANITY”. Only “when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that it implies, [can] the ‘division’ of humanity ... reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form” (de Beauvoir 687). Such change can only happen when everyone involved in the production and dissemination and reception of discriminatory messages is persuaded to examine his or her role, conscious or unconscious, in maintaining a status quo in which the extraordinary achievements of extraordinary women are rendered invisible.



Figure 8.1. Karl Marx’s tomb in Highgate Cemetery in London, United Kingdom

In conclusion, this study aims to help open a space in the discourse where women's talents, both in- and outside the home, can truly gain full and equal recognition. The interdisciplinary critical perspective that this research deploys by integrating theories and principles from different disciplines facilitates future investigations into the problem of aligning issues of recognition and equality for women with traditional cultural norms which determine how societal approbation is expressed.

## **EPILOGUE**

### **I MADE IT!**

When I decided to work on this research topic, I did not even know whether I could complete it or whether it would gain a wide-scale of acknowledgement from scholars of relevant fields. The uncertainty was due to my assumption that gender inequality in the context of sports was not something that sounded interesting because existing feminist research focused significantly on day-to-day life experience, such as gender inequality in education, and in employment. Therefore, I was not sure if I could find an adequate amount of literature to which to refer. However, my research revealed a need for an expansion of the scope of research into specific contexts where an interdisciplinary critical perspective could reveal the extent to which gender inequality remains a problem in the discourse of sports, and of the Olympics in particular.

I acknowledge that an interdisciplinary critical perspective in addressing gender discrimination in sports demands a knowledge of a variety of disciplines. However, as this research was drawing to a close, I was increasingly convinced that this research would be of great inspiration and enlightenment for feminist scholars with regard to its interdisciplinarity in both the theoretical constructs and the analytical framework. In fact, no studies in modern society can work independently in addressing a problem fully without taking an interdisciplinary view. Only through a dynamic interaction and cooperation between scholars in different fields of research can humanities create further wisdom.

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**APPENDIX A**

**PORTRAYAL OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL JOBS WOMEN PURSUE**

**IN THE MAOIST-ERA CHINA**

*Collected in:*

- Wolf, Michael. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From the Collection of Michael Wolf*. Köln: Taschen, 2008. Print. (Author's name abbreviated as: **W**)
- Landsberger, Stephen R., and Marien van Der Heijden. *Chinese Posters*. Munich: Prestel, 2009. Print. (Authors' names abbreviated as: **Lv**)
- Cushing, Lincoln, and Ann Tompkins. *Chinese Posters: Art from Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. Print. (Authors' names abbreviated as: **CT**)

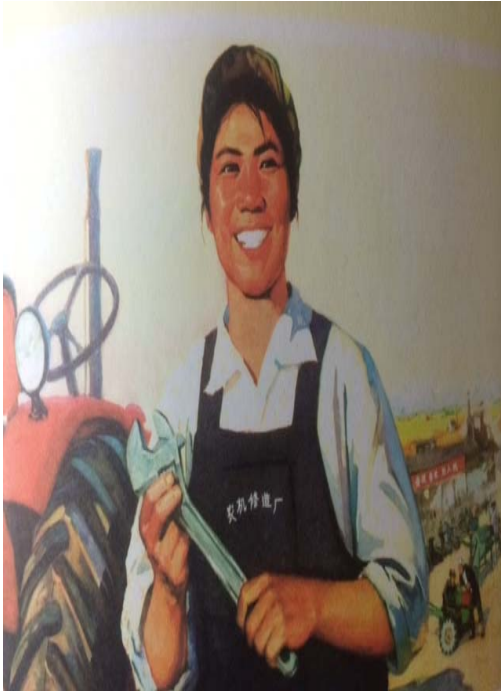
W 284



W 284



CT 73



Lv 61



**APPENDIX B**

**PORTRAYAL OF THE TRADITIONAL JOBS WOMEN PURSUE IN**

**THE MAOIST-ERA CHINA**

*Collected in:*

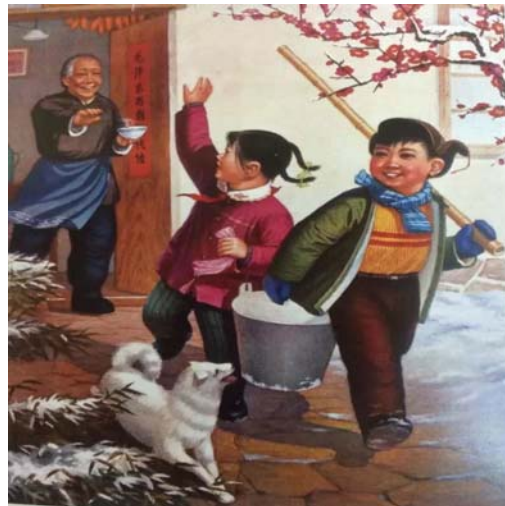
- Wolf, Michael. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From the Collection of Michael Wolf*. Köln: Taschen, 2008. Print. (Author's name abbreviated as: **W**)
- Landsberger, Stephen R., and Marien van Der Heijden. *Chinese Posters*. Munich: Prestel, 2009. Print. (Authors' names abbreviated as: **Lv**)
- Cushing, Lincoln, and Ann Tompkins. *Chinese Posters: Art from Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. Print. (Authors' names abbreviated as: **CT**)

***Those who act at home***

W 126



W 272



CT68



*Those who manage kitchen*

W 127



W 142



W 151



Lv 93





*Those whose jobs are taking care of babies*

W 143



Lv 66

W 276



Lv 67

W 277



Lv 92



Lv 104



Lv 106



Lv 121



CT 77 (Top left)



CT 106 (Bottom Left)



*Those who are tied to farm*

W 172



W 174



W 176





W 177



W 188



W189



Lv 91



Lv 124



Lv 175



Lv 187



CT 62 (Bottom right)



CT 74

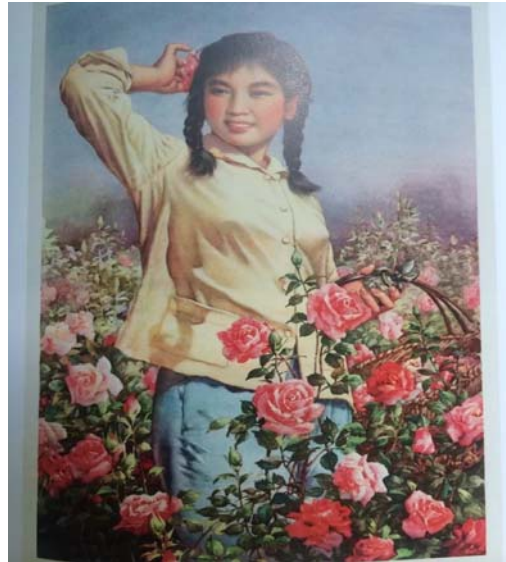


*Those who care about their appearance*

Min *et al.* 246



Lv 115





*Those who weave*

W 43



W 203



Lv 207

